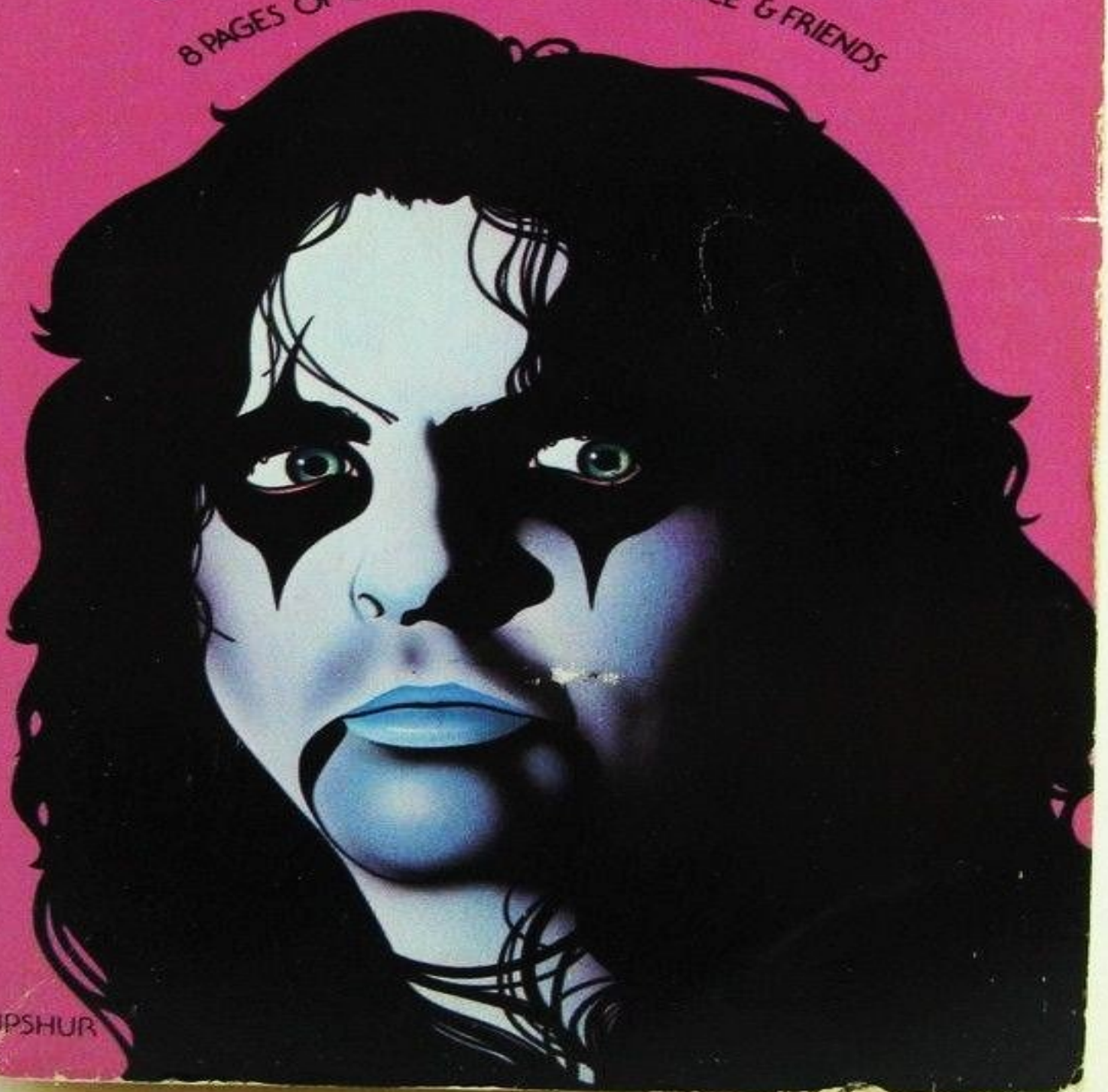
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ON THE ROAD WITH ALICE COOPER—
THE INSIDE. OUTASIGHT WORLD OF ROCK SUPERSTARDOM...
"IT KNOCKS YOU OUT!"—THE NEW YORK TIMES

BILLION DOLLAR BABY

BOB GREENE

8 PAGES OF CANDID PHOTOS OF ALICE & FRIENDS



UPSHUR

Billion Dollar Baby
Bob Greene

“Bob Greene’s ‘inside job’ is a terrifying study of power perversely used, and humiliations accepted as a life sign. In the post-Watergate era, this is more than a chronicle of a rock culture’s aberration; it offers a blinding look at our society’s necrophilia. A billion dollar baby is the ‘natural’ issue of the multi-billion dollar death wishes, passed down from the White House to the rock palace.”
—Studs Terkel

Most of the gaudy aspects of our future-shocked world—the sexuality, the titillation of forbidden pleasures, the triumph of money over taste, the fascination with travel—are seen in their harshest light on a rock-and-roll tour by a giant band.

To experience this phenomenon firsthand, Bob Greene, the prodigious 27-year-old columnist for the Chicago *Sun-Times*, joined the infamous Alice Cooper band in the winter of 1973 as a performing member of their Holiday Tour stage show.

From the inside, and with an uncanny eye for the wild comedy, the surprising pathos and the rambunctious drama of the spectacle, Mr. Greene draws the reader into the middle of an incredible world: a world of marathon recording sessions in New York studios, of dope and liquor and lavish hotel suites and thousands of fans screaming your name and nocturnal raps on the door from teen-age girls who adore you; a world of charter flights on luxurious private jets, of conniving and cruelty and planned outrage. All the while, we are moved to share Mr. Greene’s divided feelings of guilt and elation, repulsion and camaraderie, as he becomes an intimate and confidant of the band, and his sense of pride as

he masters his role on stage—that of Santa Claus, whom the band beats and stomps to death as a finale.

Rock-and-roll stardom is the most modern of success stories, and Mr. Greene demonstrates convincingly that the Alice Cooper band is the most significant and revealing success of all.

Reading this book is like watching Kubrick's Clockwork Orange. It's a world riddled with onstage ebullience and offstage ennui, drugs and kinky sex and constant hysteria. The all-night recording sessions, the all-night binges, the groupies all day and all night—it’s all there... Billion Dollar Baby tells it, unsparingly!"
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''BOTH EXHILARATING AND FRIGHTENING... a book that must not be taken lightly... It’s a clear picture of the insane world of rock, but it is also more. It offers us a look at the strange, mad, incomprehensible energy at the heart of American life!'
—Chicago Sun-Times

This book is the most complete, most entertaining, most accurate and informative trip into a world where most people will never go... Once you read one page, you'll not be able to stop!
—Cincinnati Enquirer

“THIS MAY BE THE BEST BOOK EVER ON THE PHENOMENON OF ROCK ’N’ ROLL... In order to see that world from the inside, the author became a working member of the Alice Cooper band. The result is a totally engrossing and thoroughly unsettling book that deserves to be read by parents and fans alike.”
—Kansas City Star

“IT IS MUCH MORE THAN JUST THE BEST ROCK TOUR BOOK YET WRITTEN... Beside capturing the atmosphere of a rock tour so well that you can almost feel you are part of the band, the author has managed to penetrate beyond stagecraft, and even beyond the macho offstage image, down to the human beings who are the raw material of rock stardom and often become the leftover debris.”

—Creem Magazine

“THE AUTHOR IS A CULTURAL EXPLORER... WHEN HE SWINGS, HE HITS; WHEN HE HITS, HE HURTS; AND BILLION DOLLAR BABY KNOCKS YOU OUT!”
—The New York Times

“IT IS RAUNCHY AND GROSS, BUT IT IS FASCINATING!”
—Wall Street Journal

“It has taken me into a world that I never thought I’d care to enter, has held me spellbound, and has imparted to me more of its flavor than I ever thought I’d care to taste, and left me wishing that the tour, and the book, could have gone on much longer... I couldn’t stop reading it!”
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“TREMENDOUS... the best example of first person reporting ever to come out of the entertainment world... gripping perception that exposes the arrogance, the desires, the conscience, and, yes, the tenderness.”
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“Once you begin reading this book you’re infected, waiting, hoping for some new and even creepier sickness to break out... The author, rather like Nick Carraway at Gatsby’s parties, watches all this, simultaneously enchanted and repelled.”
—Boston Globe

“This masterful diary of impressions and evaluations of the rock world—the stars, the ‘roadies,’ the tour truck drivers, managers, girlfriends, guards, limousine drivers and other shadows in the night—is impossible to put down. It reads like a novel full of character insights... it makes you laugh a lot, and makes you wonder even more.”
—Buffalo Courier-Express

“The best books tell us something new or present something already familiar in such a way that we think about it differently. Bob Greene has written the first book about rock that does both... As part of the band he was privy to more than the band bargained for.”
—Rolling Stone

“I was flat-out staggered by it... an intrusion crafted in blood and guile—a talisman for our times!”
—Hunter S. Thompson

Acknowledgments

There are some people who were a great help to me in doing this book, and I'd like to say thanks to them:

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Susan Weidel, for her kind editorial assistance.

And, of course, Shep Gordon and the Alice Cooper group, for letting me live in their world for a time.

One thing about Elvis Presley, the convulsive shouter of rock and roll songs—this may be the end of rock and roll, and just conceivably a return to musical sanity. I mean, where do you go from Elvis Presley?

—television critic John Crosby,
in the New York Herald Tribune, June 20, 1956

...and I laughed to myself
at the men and the ladies,
who never conceived
of us Billion Dollar Babies...

—Alice Cooper,
from the song “Generation Landslide”

BILLION DOLLAR BABY

ONE

On the night before it was to begin, I finished packing early, and I knew I wouldn't be able to sleep. I wandered around the apartment for a while, and finally I put a stack of albums on the stereo and lay down on the couch to think about what would soon be happening.

In the morning, I would be getting on an airplane to join a traveling rock and roll band as a performing member. I was not a musician; I was a newspaperman, and never had I walked out onto an arena stage, or stood before a microphone in a musical recording studio. I had been like the tens of millions who made up the vast audience for rock and roll—I was a record buyer, a ticket holder. And now, in a few hours, I would be stepping across the footlights.

I was not a "rock writer," not one of the newspaper reviewers whose sole interest was doing critiques of concerts and albums. I wrote a general column for the Chicago *Sun-Times*, and lately I had been spending far more time sitting in the Senate Caucus Room writing about John Ehrlichman's testimony before the Ervin Committee than following the careers of the international rock stars. But still, when I returned from work every day, on would go the radio or the record player, up would go the volume. There was no getting around it. Everything else in my life had changed since that night seventeen years before when, as a third-grader in Columbus, Ohio, I had sat in my living room with my parents and, half in a trance, first watched Elvis Presley sneering and twitching on the Ed Sullivan Show. Everything else had changed, but here I was, twenty-six years old, still an incurable rock and roll fan. And now I was leaving home to live the life of a rock and roll star, in an effort to see what that world was like from the inside.

The giant rock and roll tours represented a fantasy life that millions of people all over the world thought about and, at least during wistful moments, longed to be a part of, if only to affirm that someone really was living that way. If, in the 1920s and ’30s and ’40s, the dream of a kid growing up was to be a member of the New York Yankees or the Brooklyn Dodgers, then by the ’70s the dream of America’s young was the rock and roll dream, and the heroes were the rock and roll heroes. The cross-country tours—with their daily jet flights and lavish hotel suites and packed concert halls and astonishing profits and beautiful young girls and loud, throbbing music every night—embodied all the facets of that dream.

On a number of occasions, I had been out on tour briefly with big-money bands, working on magazine and newspaper stories. It had always been exciting and fast and fun to watch—but every time I finished one of those road trips, I felt, in the end, frustrated, wondering why it was that I still was not satisfied that I knew what it felt like to live in the rock and roll world. And the conclusion was always the same: I didn’t know because I wasn't really living in that world, I was only a visitor from the real world on a three-day pass.

If I was going to look at rock and roll life, I thought it should be from the vantage point of a performing member of the tour. I wanted to join one band that was, at this precise moment in time, realizing all the fruits of the rock and roll dream, and I wanted to experience what it was like to be a part of that harvest. Whether the dream still looked as good from the other side.

I had made my arrangements with a band. It was currently—in the closing weeks of 1973, when I was scheduled to join up—the hottest draw in the world: The Alice Cooper band. It

was a five-man group, led by a singer named Alice Cooper, who was a male. So far that year, the band had appeared before eight hundred thousand people, five. They had drawn more than four and a half million dollars at the concert box office. Their most recent album, *Billion Dollar Babies*, had become the number one selling album in the United States. In a British poll, the group had been voted the number one band in the world, and their single, “School’s Out,” had been voted top record of the year. In all—records, concerts, programs, promotions, publishing, etc.—Alice Cooper had reaped seventeen million dollars during the calendar year.

Alice Cooper was also the most talked-about musical group in the world. They had been featured in *Time* (with two pages of color photographs) and *Newsweek*. Alice himself had been profiled in publications ranging from *Cosmopolitan* to *Harper's* to the *Washington Post*. *Rolling Stone* had featured him on its cover, which might have been expected; however, so had *Forbes*, the business magazine.

The reason that Alice Cooper was currently the biggest of all rock and roll bands was not hard to discern. It stemmed from the Cooper stage show, a combination of leering sexuality and blood-drenched simulated violence that had prompted in-print reactions labeling the band as sick, degenerate, perverted, obscene, and “Nazi-like.” Alice Cooper was an American group, but its notoriety was worldwide; Leo Abse, a member of Parliament, had asked the British government to ban the Cooper band from performing in England. Abse said that he made his decision after talking to his children, Toby, sixteen, and Bathsheba, fifteen. “They tell me Alice is absolutely sick,” Abse said. “And I agree with them. I regard his act as an incitement to infanticide for his sub-teenage audience. He is deliberately trying to involve these kids in sadomasochism. He is peddling the culture of the

concentration camp. Pop is one thing; anthems of necrophilia are another.”

Abse could find agreement among many adults in the United States, but if the Alice Cooper band had become famed for its outrageous excesses, the negative publicity was only making its members wealthier. By the end of 1973, Alice Cooper was the most remarkable phenomenon in show business; when Bob Dylan began his comeback tour, a member of Dylan’s band told a reporter that he was unsure of what the reaction from audiences would be, because “we don’t chop off heads every night”—referring to a famous feature of the Cooper show.

Once the Alice Cooper group agreed to let me join them, the logistics were arranged: I would go to New York and record background vocals for the band’s new record album. Then, several weeks later, I would go on the road with them. This would be a month-long Christmastime tour, timed to coincide with the release of the new album. I would travel on their planes, ride in their limousines, stay in their hotels, appear in their bizarre stage show each night. I received permission from my newspaper to take the time off; the official memorandum in the *Sun-Times*' personnel files stated that I had requested a leave of absence “to participate in the ‘Alice Cooper Billion Dollar Babies Holiday Tour.’” Which was true enough; for this one strange chunk out of my life, I was to become a working, if temporary, Billion Dollar Baby.

TWO

IT had started the previous April. I was in Indianapolis, spending the weekend at a journalism seminar at Indiana Central College. I did this kind of thing whenever I could spare the time; it was an easy way to pick up pocket money, and a good excuse for getting out of Chicago for a couple of days. The formula was always the same: show up, appear on a few panels, talk about shield laws and freedom of the press and a journalist's responsibility in a free society, go to the evening mixers with the students and faculty, and then return home.

The weekend at Indiana Central was starting off slowly, however. The campus was tiny, there were no bars anywhere near the church-run school, and my accommodations consisted of a dormitory-style room located in the same building that housed the college cafeteria. So on Friday afternoon, after I had spoken to some English classes, I found myself staring at the ceiling of the room, and wondering how I was going to make it through the night.

I wandered over to the student union, picked up a copy of the *Indianapolis Star*, and turned to the amusements page, to see if there was a promising movie in town. There, in the middle of the page, was a big display advertisement: "TONIGHT—SOLD OUT—THE ALICE COOPER SHOW.

Fine. A way to kill the evening. I had known the Alice Cooper band casually for a couple of years. I had written about them on several occasions, and through researching the stories I had become friendly with Alice and the other members of the group, and with their manager, Shep Gordon. I figured I could call Shep at the band's hotel, and go downtown and have dinner with him. The only alternative was the Indiana Central Cafeteria.

I knew that this current Cooper tour was big. The *Billion Dollar Babies* album was on its way to number one, and the tour had already begun to generate national publicity. Alice's carefully planned outrage was finally beginning to pay impressive dividends. The first time I had met the band had been in August of 1971. They had already released three albums, called *Pretties for You, Easy Action*, and *Love It to Death*. The first two had done nothing. *Love It to Death* had gone to number 32 on the national charts. A single from *Love It to Death*, called "I'm Eighteen," had become a moderate hit. But the group was not yet famous—most of the country had never heard the name "Alice Cooper," and most of those who had probably assumed that Alice was a woman. The band was struggling to get its identity across to the public, and on the day I first encountered the group, they had been going about it in a very effective way.

The scene was a Chicago recording studio, where they were working on another album. When I walked in, Alice was singing the vocal track for one of the songs on the album. The song was called "Dead Babies," which dealt with possibly the single most offensive theme in the history of popular music. Here were five young men singing an insistent, big-beat rock and roll song about a little baby named Betty who "ate a pound of aspirin" and died.

I had watched in disbelief as Alice recorded the vocals for "Dead Babies." I found the idea of a song about the accidental death of an infant so repugnant to standard tastes that I hesitated to write about what I had seen. But I did, of course; so did a lot of writers all over the country when the album was released. This was just how Shep Gordon and the Cooper group wanted it. It was the beginning of the massive negative publicity that was to eventually make the Cooper band among the most successful in the world.

Suddenly, rock and roll fans were talking about the group that sang “Dead Babies” on an album. All of the old rumors that the band had wanted to circulate about themselves, but had been unable to, were now picked up. Alice Cooper was a homosexual; the band members were transvestites; the band ripped a chicken’s head off on stage every night, and drank the blood. None of it was true, but all of it helped to spread the name. In Charlotte, North Carolina, a girl told her mother that she had been “sickened” at an Alice Cooper show, and a reporter for the local paper did a small story about it. Shep Gordon tried to feed the Charlotte story to the wire services and to reporters for major newspapers, tried to get the word out that Alice Cooper was gaining a reputation as the sickest, most degenerate band in America. Publicity built publicity. Curiosity grew. Records were bought. Concerts were sold out. The album containing “Dead Babies,” *Killer*, went to number 28. The next album, *School’s Out*, went to number four. And now *Billion Dollar Babies* was nearing number one.

I had seen the band at several stages of this progression, but it had been a year since I had last talked to Shep. And this last year had been the one in which Alice Cooper had taken the final step from emerging band to one of the biggest-drawing acts in show business. I guessed that they probably were staying at the Indianapolis Hilton, so I called the hotel and asked for Shep.

“I’m sorry, we have orders not to allow any calls through to any members of that party.”

This was the first time that this had happened since I had known Shep and the band. Before they began to make it big, they would have given up a percentage of their royalties for the prestige of people knowing and caring they were in town. But now, apparently, supergroup security was in order.

It took me about thirty minutes to convince an assistant manager of the hotel to put me through to Shep. “Where are you?” Shep said. “You should see this tour. It’s finally happening. It’s unbelievable.” We agreed to meet for dinner at the hotel.

I promoted a ride downtown from a member of the Indiana Central College administration. He dropped me in front of the hotel, and he asked me who I was going to see.

“Some people with Alice Cooper,” I said, figuring the administrator would assume that I was referring to a girl in town, and let it go at that.

“Are you kidding?” the administrator said. “Alice Cooper? You know him? He’s amazing! What’s he like? Is he really a faggot? Do you think you could get me a picture of him for my kids?”

So it really had worked. The administration of a small church college in Indiana knew precisely who Alice Cooper was. I headed for the lobby, and for dinner with Shep Gordon.

The idea of promoting a rock and roll performer by spreading the word that he is offensive to the adult, conventional public was not new, of course. Alice Cooper was merely revitalizing it. The scheme had first been used to its greatest success nearly twenty years before by the original and most memorable rock and roll phenomenon, Elvis Presley himself. In 1956, *Parade* magazine noted that “perhaps no entertainer in history has provoked so violent a hatred in one age bracket of the public and so fanatical a loyalty in another” as Presley.

Elvis thrust his groin at America as he sang elementary rock and roll, and he was despised by much of the over-twenty-

one population. Sociologists blamed him for being “the outlet for mass teenage sex feelings.” Clergymen ranted about him from their pulpits, warning the adults in their congregations that Presley represented the downfall of their children, that he incited riots and caused juvenile delinquency. Newspaper editorials termed his stage act obscene, indecent, savage. Critics called him “unspeakably vulgar,” and demanded that he be banned from performing on television. *Life* magazine ran multi-page spreads on the Presley controversy, duly noting that throughout the country, concerned parents were debating how to combat the rise of Elvis.

That was in a different age, and Presley did not flaunt his image. True, the movie magazines reported that Elvis liked to satisfy young female autograph seekers by signing his name with lipstick on their breasts. But whenever he was questioned about the sexuality of his performances, Elvis would innocently say, “I wouldn’t do no dirty show. I just move that way ’cause I feel the music.”

The press loved the Presley story—it was sexy and titillating, and it had a guaranteed readership among both the teenagers, who loved Presley, and their parents, who hated him. Hedda Hopper, the Hollywood columnist, wrote, “I applaud the parents of teenagers who work to get the blood and horror gangster stories off TV. They should work harder against the new alleged singer, Elvis Presley.” An English music critic named Tom Richardson told his readers, “I have never met Elvis Presley, but already I dislike him... I know that this man is dangerous.” Dick Williams, the entertainment editor of the Los Angeles *Mirror-News*, wrote, “If any further proof were needed that what Elvis offers is not basically music, but a sex show, it was provided last night... [the Presley show] resembled one of those

screeching, uninhibited party rallies which the Nazis used to hold for Hitler.”

Before long, Elvis had become the symbol of the dark side of teenage America. At the same time, he was becoming the entertainment success story of the century. The public was buying all of his publicity. Even teenagers who would never have been drawn to any other musician gravitated to Presley; he had been made to stand for something, and what he stood for was them, or at least them in the way they fantasized themselves on their cockiest, most swaggering days. And the parents sensed, in Presley, a threat, the threat of losing their children to every negative force that had ever crossed their nightmares. I remember when I was ten years old, sitting at the breakfast table one day, babbling on and on about Elvis. Finally, my father interrupted. “All right,” he said, “Get off this Presley!” I asked him what was wrong with Elvis. “*What’s wrong with Elvis?*” my father said. “I’ll tell you what’s wrong with Elvis. If you were walking down an alley, and Elvis was coming the other way, and he didn’t like that patch on your shirt—he’d come up to you and rip it right off!” And with that my father reached across the table and tried to rip the alligator off my ten-year-old chest.

The outrage that Presley was causing spread to his imitators throughout the new world of rock and roll. Soon the talk was not just anti-Elvis; it was anti-rock. Frank Sinatra said, “Rock and roll is phony and false. It is sung, played and written for the most part by cretinous goons, and by means of... imbecilic reiteration and sly, lewd, in plain fact, dirty lyrics... It manages to be the martial music of every sidelined delinquent on the face of the Earth.” Every time there was violence or trouble at a rock show, the wire services picked it up. The music was equated with destruction, sex, and teenage riots. And naturally, rock and roll prospered. It was forbidden, out of bounds; of course it would grow.

By the ’60s, rock and roll was set. An entire generation of young Americans was obsessed with it, and it had become the country’s standard popular music. With the Beatles and the Rolling Stones and Bob Dylan, rock somehow began to gain respectability. It was no longer the music of sixteen-year-olds cruising for action. The original fans were getting older, and for those whose first exposure to recordings had been with Elvis and the other early rockers, rock and roll was their musical heritage. Leading rock and roll performers earned the kind of money and fame and public awe formerly associated with movie stars. Recording techniques grew more sophisticated, and rock and roll musicians began to be treated as serious artists—by the record companies, which needed them, and by the public, which adulated them. They were hailed as poets and prophets and spokesmen and geniuses. Some—James Taylor, Chicago, the Carpenters—made records that appealed to teenagers, parents, and grandparents alike. Literate publications such as *Rolling Stone* were born to chronicle what became known as the “rock culture.” Rock courses were taught in college. By the early 1970s some of the early rock and roll songs that had brought anger and turmoil to America were being advertised on television as part of nostalgic “collection” albums designed to bring back memories of a more placid era. Even Elvis had been named one of the Jaycees’ Ten Outstanding Young Men in America, and he was now a vital part of Las Vegas’s economy, right up there with Shecky Greene and Dean Martin. Rock and roll had grown up.

Into this atmosphere came Alice Cooper.

As soon as I entered the lobby of the Indianapolis Hilton, I sensed the buzz. This had become a rock and roll hotel, for one day, and the feeling was unmistakable, almost palpable. By the front door, two uniformed chauffeurs sat on a couch.

They were listening to a short, plump, frantic young man who was wearing hair to his shoulders, and a denim jacket with the Warner Brothers logo sewn on the back. He was a representative from the Warner Brothers record company, Alice's label, one of many such functionaries sent on tours by the nation's record producers to coordinate album sales in the cities where the bands played, and to act as congenial toadies for the rock and roll stars.

"I'm telling you," the young man fairly shouted at one of the chauffeurs, "Alice wants it."

"I don't know, sir," said the chauffeur, who was at least thirty years older than the Warner's rep. "Mr. Gordon said that neither of the limousines was supposed to go anywhere but between here and the coliseum."

The Warner's rep raised his arms in exasperation. "Look," he said, "I know what Shep Gordon told you. But this is for *Alice*. Can't you understand that? I was just with *Alice*, and he needs a bag of White Castles. He's hungry! Here." He handed the chauffeur a twenty-dollar bill. "Please. Just find a White Castle and bring back a bag of hamburgers. Alice okayed it."

The lobby was filled with young girls wandering, waiting to overhear someone with the touring party mention the number of the floor on which the group was staying. Security had been stepped up at the hotel, and a pair of plainclothes guards were stationed by the elevators. The telephone operators were busy denying that the Alice Cooper band was staying at the Hilton. Equipment men from the Cooper stage crew were constantly coming in and going out of the front door, on their way to or from the arena, where the Cooper stage was being constructed.

I took the elevator to the rooftop restaurant, where I was to meet Shep Gordon. He was waiting at a table by the window, overlooking Indianapolis's quiet skyline; Gordon was fidgeting with a handkerchief, which he would use every thirty seconds or so. He had developed a case of the flu on tour, but he could not take time off from the long string of one-nighters to stay in bed for a few days and get well. He was twenty-eight years old, but with his bushy receding hairline and deep-set features, he could have passed for forty. He had been managing the Alice Cooper band for five years, during which time he had brought them from anonymous status as one of the country's thousands of struggling young rock and roll groups to the point where they found themselves now, as the most controversial and top-drawing band in the world. Gordon had seldom taken a day off or a vacation during those five years, and now his work was beginning to pay off. The name "Alice Cooper" stood for something wherever it was mentioned, and Shep Gordon was well on his way to becoming a millionaire.

"You wouldn't believe what this tour has been like," Shep said. "It's everything we used to talk about, finally coming true. Sellouts, every night. The hotels are swarmed with people. I had to get Alice a bodyguard. The album's going to be number one. You should see the girls. Not like the ones who used to hang around us. These girls are beautiful, every night. You know how we used to have to go bang on doors to get publicity? It's crazy now, reporters are waiting for us at the airport, we have to have press conferences because there are too many of them for Alice to talk to them one at a time. I feel like I should be in a hospital, I can't get rid of this flu, but I'm afraid to leave, things are going too well. I can't walk away from it now."

Gordon was tall, with a prominent nose and a Groucho Marx mustache and bushy eyebrows and thick-framed glasses. He

looked as if he were wearing one of those pairs of novelty eyeglasses with the thick eyebrows and big nose and furry mustache attached, and a standard joke with the band was for everyone to put on a pair of the trick glasses just before Shep entered a room. He read all of the music trade papers, as all managers did, but he also favored such material as *The Advance Man*, Jerry Bruno's book about advancing John Kennedy's personal appearances. Gordon was fascinated with the logistics of making a person seem to be an overwhelming star; he was impressed with the fact that Bruno would never book Kennedy into a large hall where there might be a few empty seats, but preferred to use smaller halls, so that there would be an overflow waiting outside, unable to get in. Gordon had borrowed the Bruno plan: by building the band slowly, using smaller auditoriums when larger ones were available, he had made it seem as if Alice Cooper caused panic among desperate fans every night. And by this time, it had come true—Cooper was selling out the biggest halls available in each city.

Gordon had a habit of talking softly and soothingly, often tugging at an ear while he spoke. He virtually never shouted. The overall effect of this was to make him seem the opposite of the rock and roll manager stereotype. He did not appear blustery or loud or pushy or impatient or foul-natured. He found that this image helped him in his business dealings, and he learned to conceal his bursts of anger and vitriol beneath this surface calm. He often ended his sentences with question marks, even when he was not asking a question: "We're going to the hall later? They've been sold out for two weeks? I talked to Alice last night, and he said his sore throat was feeling better?" Gordon had so perfected this attitude of surface equanimity that he did not stray from it even during times when he was dealing with three or four business crises simultaneously.

We ordered dinner. Shep knew that I had spent much of the previous year traveling with the Presidential candidates, and he was full of questions about what it had been like. He was interested in how the political tours actually moved, how the campaign managers were able to haul so many people—sometimes numbering up to 250—in and out of so many cities each day. We talked about it throughout the meal, and as we waited for dessert, Shep asked what I was going to do next.

I began to talk about my idea for a rock and roll book, and about my reluctance to approach such a book from the outside because I was convinced that I needed to see it all as a participant, a *performer*, rather than as a detached observer. I talked about what rock and roll had come to mean, the success and style of life it represented, and how the voices of the rock and roll stars coming out of record players and car radios had become the sound track for the personal lives of so many millions of young Americans as they were growing up. I said that the rock and roll experience, as lived by the young men who were making the music and gathering the rewards and the fame, was something I wanted to look at and live with and try to understand. Finally, I finished my monologue.

“Why don’t you do it with us?” Gordon said.

He seemed to be serious. I had not given any thought to approaching any of the so-called “supergroups” with the idea. Rock and roll bands are small, and there is inevitably a great deal of ego involved in the idea of who gets to step upon the stage, or participate in the recording of an album. By the time a band has made it to the pinnacle of the music world, I assumed, its members would not even consider the idea of a writer joining them as a performer. They do not need the publicity any more, and they are so used to doing

their show in the manner they have developed from the beginning that to add someone else to their troupe would be unthinkable. I figured that if any band would ever agree to let me in as a performer, it would surely be a local, unknown group eager to be written about. And that was not the kind of band whose world I wanted to share. I had not considered approaching Shep with a request to join Alice Cooper, even though the Cooper band was ideal for my purposes. Not only were they a giant, worldwide success, but also, because of the nature of their appeal, the notorious excesses of their stage show, they provided a unique case study of where, in the middle of the ’70s, rock and roll had come. I explained all of this to Shep.

“Come to the show tonight,” he said. “Let’s both think about it some. I like the idea.”

I was kneeling behind a huge speaker tower, stage right. The opening act had just finished and gone off to their dressing room. Now, a few feet away from me, the Alice Cooper equipment men were preparing the stage for the entrance of the Cooper band.

From my vantage point on the stage, there did not seem to be one square foot of open space in the arena. When I had wandered around Indianapolis on the day I arrived in town for the journalism seminar, it had seemed devoid of young people. But tonight, here in the barnlike arena, more than ten thousand of them had materialized. All halter tops and bare stomachs and hair and jeans—-this could just as easily have been Los Angeles, or Miami.

In front of the stage, a shallow barricade had been constructed to provide a few feet between the audience and the performers. The barricade was low, so that the audience could press up against it and still see. In the space between the barricade and the stage, a number of young ushers in

blue sport coats had been posted. They looked nervous, as they stood their ground inside the barricade. Already, before the Cooper performance had even begun, the crowd was frantic, fighting one another to get as close to the stage as they could. They pushed and swayed; the people who had paid for seats near the front were not going to be able to see, because already thousands from the back were battling to be one of the lucky ones to cram into the area dividing the first row of seats from the edge of the barricade.

It was hypnotic to watch this frenzy. I had seen Cooper shows in the past, but it had never been like this. This was the kind of giddy, nervous, physical excitement associated with early Beatles shows, or Rolling Stones concerts. But tonight the stars had not even appeared yet, and the mob in front already was at a peak of energy. Shep had been right; it really was happening to Alice Cooper, and the sight I was witnessing in front of me was the proof. It was a ludicrous scene; I looked out at this howling, moving, hungry crowd, surging toward the stage, and then I turned my head to look at the stage itself—and saw only carpenters and equipment movers, working on the props, oblivious to the thousands crushing toward them.

The stage setting was impressive. It had been built on a number of levels, and it featured towers and platforms and lighted stairs. Glittering mirrored silver balls, and gilded human forms, hung from the gold towers. Behind the main set was a tall totemlike figure, with intense beams of lights shooting from the eyes. The set had all the complexity and intrigue of a space shot launching area—the absolute opposite number to the bare stage featured by most rock and roll bands. Shep had told me that this stage, and this show, was the culmination of what the band had been trying to build from the beginning. At the outset of the tour, Alice had told reporters, “Sure, people keep getting sicker, so do

we. The sicker you kids all get out there, the sicker we'll get."

The lights went down. More from the audience joined the crush at the front, and lunged against the barricade, screaming. The Alice Cooper musicians took their places at the various levels of the set, picking up their guitars, testing the drum kit. The musicians were dressed all in white satin, with green-bejeweled dollar signs sewed onto the suits. They stood in darkness. And then a voice came over the arena's loudspeakers: "And now, will you welcome, America's own Billion Dollar Babies...the legendary... ALICE... COOPER!!!"

The band hit the first chords of the song, and the hall was filled with music cranked up to a volume approaching the pain level. Smoke filled the front of the stage. And making his way through the fog, walking slowly, half crouched, was Alice Cooper. He was singing a song called "Hello! Hooray!", a show-opener that told the audience in specific terms that he was ready, he was feeling strong. "Let the show begin," he sang, and told the audience that he knew they loved every moment, every scream.

Alice looked astounding. He was wearing a pair of white leotards and tights, ripped and tom. The leotards were stained in places, and the tights had turned a dull, repulsive shade of red around the crotch, as if Alice had been bleeding there. He was wearing thigh-length leopard-skin boots with six-inch heels. He tottered on the boots as he lurched toward the front of the stage, fighting his way through the smoke. His eyes and mouth were covered with black fangs and lines, drawn with mascara. His dark, stringy hair reached down his back.

At the extreme front edge of the stage, part of a mannequin had been placed on top of an unused microphone stand. The mannequin was the trunk of a woman's body—just the

stomach and breasts. There was no head, and there were no legs. Alice approached the form. He continued to sing “Hello! Hooray!” and at the same time he began to caress the breasts of the mannequin.

He rubbed the mannequin’s nipples. In the front row, the fourteen-year-old girls were reaching for him, crying out with pleasure. Alice got on his knees, a mad, vicious look in his eyes. He looked underneath the mannequin, and he began lapping his tongue toward its groin as he stared. Then he stood up, rubbed his hands roughly over the breasts again, and savagely knocked the form off the microphone stand and toward the back of the stage.

Behind him, the band was shifting into the next song. It was the title song from the new album, *Billion Dollar Babies*. Alice sang the lyrics, about a little girl who is “grimy as an alley” and “slicker than a weasel.” The number was the antithesis to a classic love song. Alice compared his girlfriend to a foaming, rabid dog. Instead of promising her his tender touch, he sang a warning:

If I’m too rough tell me,
I’m so scared your little head will come off in my hands...

The band’s music was standard, raw, hard, big-beat rock and roll. Alice’s voice, though, was a demented semi-whine, a deliberate approximation of the sound of a tortured psychotic. As Alice sang, he continued to roam the front of the stage. The young fans in front were reaching out to him, stretching their hands over the barricade. Alice stopped. He brought up some phlegm from deep in his chest, and he spit it out at the audience. He did it again and again, whenever he could gather up enough mucus. When people were actually able to touch the stage, Alice kicked out at them, trying to land his boot on a hand or an arm. With barely a second to pause, he and the band went into the third song,

“Elected.” It was a rock and roller’s plea for his teenage constituents to put him in government office, where, “young and strong,” they could all live by the rules that he decreed. He snarled his demand:

I’m your top prime cut of meat,
I’m your choice,
I wanna be elected...

I found myself staring at the audience. From my spot on the side of the stage, I could see their eyes. They were excited, yes; but all good live rock and roll music does that to a crowd. The speakers in a big hall are so powerful that you can physically reach up and touch the sound of a bass guitar, you can be shaken by the beat of a drum, your skin can sense the piercing of a high, quivering guitar line. The music is exciting, and to be there hearing it and seeing the musicians moving around on stage and feeling it in your feet is exhilarating, and for an audience to be turned on by the music is the rule, not the exception. But with Alice Cooper tonight, there was something added. These people in the audience were having trouble breathing in a regular pattern. Some of them were trembling. Along the barricade, two girls had passed out from the heat and the pressure of the crowd behind them, and were slumped over the short wall, unconscious. But the people next to them did not notice. Their eyes could not move away from Alice. The people were more than just excited, they were titillated and fiercely aroused and almost hypnotized by what they were seeing. This is what rock and roll wasn’t supposed to be any more: forbidden, and dangerous, and past the edge. One girl was sobbing with ecstasy and she held out her arm for Alice to kick, or to spit at. He finished “Elected,” and then sat down on the edge of the stage, dangling his legs in front of the audience. He began to sing “I’m Eighteen, his surly punk national anthem, in which he praised the idea of being

young and angry and confused and ready to run away from the home town:

I’m eighteen, and I don't know what I want...
I gotta get out of this place...

There was an empty can of beer sitting by Alice on the stage. He picked it up, and stuffed it down into his tights. It made a bulge in his crotch. Some objects were thrown onto the stage from the audience—flashcubes, paper cups, wads of paper and he jammed them down into his tights too. He sang “I’m Eighteen” all the while, occasionally rubbing one of his hands over the lump in the front of his pants.

The show continued like this. It was warm in the arena, and by the middle of the performance more of the people at the front of the crowd has passed out on their feet. I could see them, and I could see that no one would help them. Several of them, pinned in by the incredible jam-up of bodies, did not even fall to the ground, but were held upright, unconscious, by the pressure of the bodies on every side of them. The young fans who could take the heat and the stifling air, though, seemed delighted with the show as the band went through “Raped and Freezing,” “No More Mr. Nice Guy,” and “My Stars.”

During “Unfinished Sweet,” a song about a decayed tooth, a long metal table was wheeled on from stage left. Alice sang about the pain in his mouth, about a dentist gleefully removing a man’s gums, about the pain of a drill hitting a nerve:

Saint Vitus dance on my molars tonight,
Aching to get me...

Then Alice went over to the table, and lay flat on his back. As the instrumental portion of the song continued, a little

bearded man in a dentist's coat came on from stage left. The dentist was holding a giant, funnel-shaped drill, covered with flashing colored lights. As he touched the drill to Alice's mouth, a horrible, screeching, familiar sound filled the arena: the unmistakable sound of a dentist's drill, boring into enamel, recorded on tape and amplified ten thousand times and fed into the hall's speaker system. People in the audience hunched their shoulders and closed their eyes and waited for the painful noise to end. When it finally did, Alice stood up and looked over to stage right. A girl dressed with a tooth over her head and chest, but with her legs, in white tights, sticking out from the bottom, danced onto the stage. Alice picked up a large toothbrush, rubbed it against the girl, knocked her down, rubbed her some more with the brush and then fell on top of her, still rubbing against her. And the lights went out.

After a few seconds of darkness, a series of strobe lights began to illuminate the stage. The band was gone. The dark, brooding strains of "Night On Bald Mountain" were piped over the loudspeakers. From stage right, a half dozen men pushed a wheelbarrow to the center of the stage. Their movements were exaggerated by the strobes as they tossed the contents of the wheelbarrow to the floor. The objects appeared to be body parts—arms, legs, parts of chests, hands. The men began to fight viciously, using the body parts to club one another. A leg would be lifted into the air, crash down on someone's head. An arm was swung around, then slammed into someone's face. The fight went on for several minutes, and then the men ran off. The body parts were left on the stage. The arena went black again. In a few moments, harsh white spotlights cut through the darkness. There was no overhead illumination, no other stage lights.

The band came back on, now dressed all in black. And from stage right came Alice himself, also in black. Around his

neck was coiled a long, thick, live boa constrictor. The snake twisted and stretched, its tongue darting in and out. Alice unwound it and held it in front of him. The snake struggled to break free. The band began to play, and Alice to sing, a number called “Sick Things.” The song was about his audience, how sick they were to come and worship him, but how he knew they could not help it, how they were his pets —his things:

You things are chilled with fright for I am out tonight.
You tell me where to bite, you whet my appetite...

Alice let the snake crawl around his body. He moved the snake’s skin against his own. He held it while it wound behind him, then slithered slowly out between his legs, its tongue still flicking, its body reaching toward the audience. He held it to his face, and then he pushed the snake’s head inside his own mouth. As the band played, he handed the snake to a stagehand. Then the song shifted. Alice turned toward the back of the stage, and when he faced forward again, he was holding a small baby doll. The audience screamed in anticipation. It was time for “Dead Babies.” He began to sing, about the little girl named Betty who was too young to know not to take pills from a cabinet shelf. Alice moaned the gruesome lyrics telling of Betty’s death, of Betty’s mother’s failure to hear her baby calling, and failure to arrive in time to save the child.

He held the baby doll up so the audience could see it. He began to rub his hands along the doll’s body. He felt the baby’s legs, stuck his hand up its dress. He pressed the baby to his stomach and rubbed the doll against him. Slowly, he undressed the doll. At the end, he began to rip the dress off with his teeth, and he kept singing:

Dead babies,
Can't take care of themselves,

Dead babies,
Can't take things off the shelves...

He sang that no one wanted the baby anyway, and many of the young people in the front of the audience were singing along with him. They knew all of the words, and some of the girls were open-mouthed and jumping up and down as they sang, shouting the words, not stopping for breath. Alice ripped off one of the doll's arms, and dangled it toward the front rows. There was a violent move to get to him. He tossed the baby's arm into the crowd. There was a vicious fight for it. Alice lay the doll face up on the stage, and sang some more, about how little Betty now slept in the graveyard, in a burial dress of burgundy and white.

He walked toward the back of the stage. He returned to the front carrying a hatchet. He waved it over the nude body of the doll. He began to bring the hatchet down, chopping and chopping, cutting the body up into small pieces, swinging the hatchet again and again. A blood like red liquid poured from the doll's body and spread over the floor of the stage. All during the performance, Cooper had not allowed a smile to come onto his face, and he was still wearing a grim expression as he chopped and repeated the chorus:

Dead babies,
Can't take care of themselves.
Dead babies,
Can't take things off the shelves...

He stood up and walked away from the mutilated doll. He mockingly sang "Goodbye, little Betty," and as he repeated the line, the entire audience was on its feet, singing with him. Even as they excitedly hailed the baby's death, a new song began. Alice got down on his hands and knees. The body parts that had been left on stage during the costume change were still there. He began to fondle them, to hug

them to him, to roll on top of them and make love to them. And he began to sing a song called “I Love the Dead”:

I love the dead before they’re cold,
They’re bluing flesh for me to hold...

His ode to necrophilia said that the family and loved ones of the deceased might mourn at the graveside, but that Alice never knew the person with the now-decomposing face, and that he had other plans for the corpse. The rest of the band began to back him up with a vocal chorus expressing their own love for the dead.

From stage left, a large machine, draped with black cloth, was pushed into view. The cloth was removed to show a guillotine, with a glistening steel blade. Alice walked behind the guillotine and laid his head on a shelf five feet beneath the blade. The band continued to sing its “I Love the Dead” chorus. An executioner, hooded and dressed in black, came out. He stood by the side of the guillotine, and suddenly the music stopped. The executioner pulled on a wooden lever, and the blade dropped. Alice’s head appeared to be lopped off. The audience stared at the machine, as the executioner bent down to examine a bucket in front of it. He dipped his hands into the bucket. They came out red. He dipped them in again. This time he pulled out, by the hair, what appeared to be the severed head of Alice Cooper.

The executioner dragged the head across the stage. It left a streak of red in its wake. Smoke filled the stage, as it had at the beginning of the show. The rest of the Cooper band ran to the guillotine, and dragged away what appeared to be Alice’s headless body. They continued to sing the chorus over a background of recorded instrumentals. They kicked and swung at the body, and tried to eat it. They leaped into the air and came down with their knees landing on it. One

guitarist grabbed Alice's bloody "head" by the hair and swung it around. Then the lights went out again.

Moments later, when the lights blazed back on, Alice Cooper was strutting across the stage in white tails and a top hat. The band was again on stage, playing a fast rocker, "School's Out." Alice was waving a long sword, which had been rammed through a stack of one-dollar bills. The bills had been strung out along the sword. He swung it out over the audience, just above the reach of the people in front.

"You're sick!" Alice screamed into the microphone. "You're all sick! You want to see how sick you are?" The crowd was shouting and surging toward the stage. The band played on. "Here!" Alice screamed. He lowered the sword to within inches of the audience, and the people scrambled and kicked to get to it, to thrust their hands at the blade so that they might come away with a dollar.

Then Alice started to toss the posters. They were rolled up into long tubes: pictures of the Alice Cooper band. He kept singing "School's Out," and he teased the crowd with the promise of the posters. When he would notice a particularly rough area in the crowd, where people were in danger of toppling over, he would flip a poster into their center, and watch them slug one another and rip their way toward the souvenir. He began to throw them out faster and faster, and by the end of the song the front of the arena looked like a riot corridor.

I couldn't believe it. I knelt behind the speaker box and watched Alice goad the people on, and the thought that someone might die in the tumbling, kicking crush was not at all ridiculous. Ten feet from me, inside the barricades, a plump young usher with a short haircut and the regulation blue jacket had noticed that one of the support beams had begun to break. If it went, the barricade would give way and

the thousands of people would fall after it, toward the stage. The usher tried to shore it up, and a girl in a plain white tee shirt on the other side of the barricade saw what he was doing. She began to try to pull the support beam away, so that the barricade would fall. The usher shoved her aside with his back. He was frightened; if the barricade were to go, he would probably be crushed by the crowd.

The girl began to reach over and scratch at him, trying to force him to let the barricade drop. On the other end of the stage, Alice was flinging posters. The young usher would not let the barricade collapse. The girl hit at him, and finally she reached over, took his glasses from his face, and snapped them in two. He continued to hold the support beam in place.

The song ended. The band ran off stage, came back for a quick encore. They sang “Under My Wheels,” and then left again. The crowd was demanding more, screaming so loudly that the building shook. So the band came out once more. Alice was carrying an American flag, which he placed in a standard on the stage. There was music, but this time it was not coming from the band. It was a tape recording. The singer was Kate Smith, and the song was “God Bless America.”

I looked up. Shep Gordon was standing beside the spot where I was kneeling. I stood up. He was laughing. “Ever see anything like it?” he said.

We agreed that I would join the group as a temporary member. The stipulations were not complicated. Shep wanted it understood that he would be the one to select what songs I would participate on for the album, and what role I would play during the Holiday Tour. I wanted it understood that, as a performer with the group, I was working for the Alice Cooper band—but that as a writer, I

was working for myself. After the tour was over, whatever I decided to write about my experiences would be up to me, and neither Shep nor the group would assume any financial or editorial interest in whatever resulted. To assure this independence, I insisted on paying all of my own expenses on the road.

In the six months between the night I saw Alice Cooper in Indianapolis and the time I was to leave Chicago to begin my trip with the group, several people reacted quite negatively to the news that I would be doing it. They were repelled by the very idea of Alice Cooper, his band's image, and what they believed it to stand for. They found Alice Cooper repugnant, and wondered if I was having any misgivings over becoming a part of that. The answer was no. The more I thought about the Alice Cooper phenomenon, and the rock and roll phenomenon in general, the more curious and fascinated I became. And with that fascination came a renewed desire to find out what it was like inside that world. There seemed no better way to do it. I was ready to join the band.

THREE

Just west of Manhattan's theater district, in the rear of the first floor of an office building at 321 West Forty-fourth Street, back past a bank of elevators, there is an unmarked wooden door. Walk through this door, and there is an abrupt, tiny hallway, and another wooden door. Inside this second door is a business office of sorts. Called the Record Plant, the office is a maze of recording studios, available for hire to musicians and their record companies. This is where the million-selling albums are put together. The Record Plant is popular with many of the world's famous rock and roll bands; its name appears among the credits on the back of a great number of top-selling albums. It is not a place for crowds, or for screaming fans. It is meant for work, and its owners compute their billing charges at an hourly rate. There is very little tomfoolery or rock and roll decadence at the Record Plant; its rates are too high, and its available hours for rental in too much demand, to allow thrown-away time. This is where I arrived just after dark on a Thursday night in late September.

I had come to New York to record background vocals for the new Alice Cooper album. The album, to be called *Muscle of Love*, had to be completed and mixed and on the Warner Brothers pressing machines within two and a half weeks in order for *Muscle of Love* to be in the stores for Christmas season sales—and for the natural promotional benefits that it would receive by being available for purchase during the upcoming Holiday Tour. I was scheduled to sing background vocals on two of the album's songs; my day for recording had tentatively been set for the following Monday. I came to the Record Plant several days early because I wanted to watch the album being made before my time in front of the microphone. I figured that the experience might go easier if I had some idea of what I was doing.

The lobby was empty when I arrived at the office building; all of the regular tenants had left for the day. Both doors to the Record Plant were unlocked, but there was no one in its receiving area. I wandered around the various studios until I came to one at the very back edge of the office complex. There, seated behind a long silver console board, was a round, pudgy man with thick arms extending from a brown tee shirt, and a short gray beard. He was moving along the console, arranging knobs, consulting a hand-penciled diagram as he moved his hands from button to button.

“We heard you might come early,” the man said. “Alice isn’t here yet. You can sit down and watch TV if you want. Want a Coke or some beer? There’s some in that little refrigerator right outside the door.” The man was Jack Richardson. He was forty-four years old, a citizen of Canada with a wife and five children at home in Toronto. He was the owner of a company called Nimbus Nine, whose business it was to produce record albums. Nimbus Nine had produced the last four Cooper albums—all gold records. Richardson worked for royalties, for a percentage of the albums he produced, just as the singers and musicians did. He was in charge of getting *Muscle of Love* made. Studio time was costing the Alice Cooper group a hundred and fifty dollars an hour, and Richardson was the man who determined how that time would be spent.

The studio consisted of two rooms. The room where Richardson adjusted the console was the control room. It was by far the smaller of the two; it was dominated by the control panel, behind which were chairs for Richardson and his technical assistants. The walls behind and to the sides of the console were covered with various kinds of electronic paraphernalia. There was not a wasted foot of space, and the impression it gave was that of a pilot’s cockpit in a jet

airplane. By the time Richardson and his assistants had wedged themselves into their seats, they would be unable to reach out in any direction without banging into a recording tool. In front of the console, there was a vertical drop of perhaps four feet, and then another five feet forward until the small room ended at a large picture window. This space was used for a couch and several chairs; in front of them, on a coffee table by the picture window, was a color portable television set, facing the console. The room was designed so that a visitor could sit on the couch in front of the console, looking through the picture window or watching the TV, without the top of his head blocking the engineers' direct view through the window. Above the window, in a small wooden area that reached the ceiling, were some of the room's battery of stereophonic loudspeakers.

This was the room for the producers and tape editors. On the other side of the picture window was a much larger room, a long, carpeted area outfitted with stools and adjustable lighting and microphone stands. This was for the musicians. The room was soundproof. The performers would make their music in this larger room, guided by the engineers they could see through the glass, but could hear only via an intercom system.

Muscle of Love would be a hit; about this, there was no question. Following up on the number one success of *Billion Dollar Babies*, by a group as currently hot as Alice Cooper, the new record was guaranteed to "ship gold"—to leave the pressing plants with better than a million dollars in advance orders, before any of the record buyers had even heard it. Richardson had supervised the recording of the instrumentals in Los Angeles. He had not been happy with the studio in California, and had decided to record the vocals back in Manhattan. There were sixteen individual tracks available on every tape, and each guitarist, keyboard

man, and percussionist had recorded his own part separately, on an individual track. Now it was time for Alice to come in and put his vocals over the instrumental bed tracks. When Alice was finished, the backup vocals would be added, and then the album would be “sweetened”: horns and strings would be used to fill out parts of songs that seemed thin or weak. When all of this had been completed, Richardson would take the tapes and mix the sixteen tracks on each song until all nine songs on *Muscle of Love* sounded like finished records.

Behind the Record Plant console, unloading one of the tapes from its heavy cardboard carton, was Richardson’s assistant, an athletic-looking man named Jack Douglas, in his late twenties and wearing a Mickey Mouse tee shirt.

The professional recording tape looked like a giant, fifty-magnification mutant of a standard reel-to-reel tape. Douglas used both hands to place the tape on a spindle, and then threaded it to a receiving spool. When Douglas had carried the five tapes—four containing the band’s instrumental tracks to two songs, one containing a single song—toward the gate at Los Angeles International Airport, a security guard had motioned for him to walk through a metal detection shed. Douglas had told the guard that he did not want to carry the tapes through the shed, that he wanted them lifted around any X-ray machines. The guard insisted; he said the machines would not harm the tapes. Douglas had told him, “Look, there’s a million dollars worth of recordings on these five tapes. I’m not exaggerating, either. Can I have your name? And can you guarantee me that you’ll take full responsibility if anything goes wrong?” The guard had changed his mind, and had personally carried the tapes out of the way of the X-ray machines. Douglas had kept the tapes next to him in the first class cabin all the way

to New York; he would sleep with them in his hotel room every night until the album was completed.

I sat down on the couch and watched the television. Behind me, Richardson flipped a switch and asked Douglas, “Does this preview the cue?” On the TV, an old “I Love Lucy” show was on. It was black-and-white, and Desi Arnaz was singing to Lucille Ball, “We’re having a baby, my baby and me…”

Alice Cooper walked into the control room. He was carrying a paper sack, and he emptied the contents onto the couch: two six-packs of Budweiser, and a quart bottle of Seagram’s V.O. whisky. “Hey!” he said to me. “Welcome to show business! Is that TV black-and-white, or is it just the show? We’re going to have trouble making it through the week if we don’t have a color set.”

He was twenty-five years old and his yearly income was higher than that of the President of the United States. He was wearing old jeans, and a blue jean jacket top over a shrunken blue tee shirt that showed half of his belly. He was tan; he had been in the sun in California, waiting for the time to do his vocals in the studio out there, and when the plans had been switched he had flown directly to New York. He was wearing a pair of white yachting shoes without socks, and his ankles were tan too, from months spent on Fire Island and in Puerto Rico and California after the spring tour had ended. Now it was almost October, and time to work again.

We had not seen each other since the night of the show in Indianapolis when, after Shep and I had returned from the concert, we had gone to a party in the hotel. All around the room people had been drinking and eating sandwiches and talking and laughing. But Alice had been in front of the television set, staring at the screen, and again tonight his eyes fastened instantly on the set. He reached for a can of

beer and popped it open without turning his head from the picture. The beer and the television were his two habits; both were with him constantly. “You would have loved California,” he said, looking at me with one eye while keeping the other within peripheral view of “I Love Lucy,” five feet away. “I just stayed in the sun all day. We had this great Mexican maid, she kept leaving tacos for us. I learned to play golf. I love it. We were at this country club one morning, and this guy in front of us was hitting the ball three hundred yards. So I watched him, and I started to hang around him and imitate him. And pretty soon I was really hitting them, way over two hundred yards, which is pretty good for me, ’cause I’m just starting. And at the end of the day, I find out that the guy I’ve been following around and copying is Doug Sanders. No wonder! I’m getting free lessons from Doug Sanders!”

Behind us, Richardson and Douglas were preparing to start the evening’s business. “You feel like doing it, Alice?” Richardson said.

Alice tossed his empty beer can into a wastebasket, opened another can. “I guess I’m getting ready,” he said. “One more beer, and I’ll be ready. Which one are we gonna do tonight?”

“Which one do you want to do tonight?” Richardson said.

Alice watched TV. “Let’s do ‘Man with the Golden Gun,’” he said. “We were gonna do two, right? Let’s do ‘Never Been Sold Before,’ too. Is that all right?”

“It’s your show,” Richardson said. “We’ll do as many as you want.”

Jack Douglas moved a switch to test the sound. The instrumental track of “Never Been Sold Before,” a steady rocker, poured out of all the speakers in the room. It was a

phenomenal sound: so loud, as loud as a concert arena, the dream volume of every kid who ever played a record behind his locked bedroom door while his father banged and shouted for him to turn it down—but clear, too, unlike the muddy, dirty distortion of a rock and roll hall, instead as precise and well defined as the finest living room stereo. Alice leaned over to me, to shout directly in my ear so that he could be heard above the song:

“I just bought the biggest TV in the world,” he yelled. “Shep bought one, too. We got them in California. The screen is four feet by four feet. Sony makes them. We got the only ones available. It cost me five thousand dollars. But it’s worth it. Think how big that screen is. Think of the football games on Sundays.”

“Never Been Sold Before” roared on around us. After about a minute, Douglas moved the switch back, and the tape whirred to a stop in mid-note. “Ready when you are,” Richardson said.

Alice was watching an old David Niven movie on the little TV. He turned the sound down, but left the picture on. He walked through a side door, and was in the performers’ room. There was a piano in a back corner, and he walked over to it and punched some of the keys. The sound blasted into the engineers’ room through the speakers. He went up to the microphone, which was perhaps ten feet from the picture window. He threw his blue jean jacket onto the floor, and went through a Johnny Carson golf swing. He tugged a pair of earphones over his head. “Uh. Uh. Uh. Uh. Huh. Oh,” he said, and his voice filled the control room. He shifted into a deep, portentious horror movie voice: “People of Earth, you are four billion years behind us. Make that five billion.”

Jack Richardson spoke into the intercom. “Let’s go through it once just to get your voice loose,” he said. Jack Douglas

started the instrumental tape of “Never Been Sold Before.” Alice glanced at a sheet of notebook paper with his lyrics written on it. He pressed the headphones close to his ears, and began to sing:

You ask me, babe.
Can you work tonight?
I’ve been up, babe, since broad daylight...

It was a standard Cooper song, in which Alice describes himself in terms of a woman who is “stacked nice,” and who is being made to work as a prostitute. But he protests that he won’t become a “lousy whore,” and vows never to be sold again; virtue emerges triumphant.

I sat on the couch, drinking a beer and watching. In front of me, on the television, David Niven smiled ironically. In the reflection on the picture window, I could see Richardson and Douglas behind me, reaching for dials. Through the glass, Alice was rubbing his stomach as he sang. A scar extended from the top of his jeans. He was thin, and the beginnings of a double chin looked incongruous on his skinny face. He was wearing the stubble of a beard, maybe two days’ growth. There was a pale, splotchy area on his left wrist; he had worn a pair of silver bracelets all summer, and some soap had gotten underneath and rotted. His voice, singing hard for the first time since the spring tour, was rough and uneven. He was not known for having a smooth, professional voice anyway, even by snarling rock and roll standards; but tonight, on the first song, it wasn’t even close to the normal Alice Cooper sound. To make matters worse, Richardson had turned down all the instrumentals in the control room. Alice could hear the band playing in his earphones, but the only sound we were hearing was his bare voice. It was pretty bad; no better than the most atonal teenager singing along with

the car radio. Jack Douglas stopped the tape, and began to rewind it.

“Okay,” said Richardson into the intercom. “Let’s try it again.”

Alice motioned to get my attention. “It comes with a videotape of *Deep Throat*” he said.

I didn’t know what he was talking about. I shrugged.

“My TV,” he said from the other side of the picture window.

“Ready,” said Jack Richardson. The instrumentals began again. Alice lost the lyrics in places, but kept singing. He knew he would be doing it for a while before Richardson was satisfied. “Never Been Sold Before,” in its final recorded version, would be a four minute and twenty second song. Tonight Alice would sing his vocal part for just over three hours before Richardson would say he was finished. The tape kept playing through, rewinding, playing again. Alice kept opening more cans of Bud.

At one point, Alice waved for Richardson to stop the tape. He had just been singing the middle of the song, about being sick of streets and tricks and dicks.”

Alice spoke into his microphone. “Can we say ‘dicks’ in that line?” he said. “You know, I mean it like ‘detectives.’ You know, ‘dicks,’ like ‘vice detectives.’ But I think this song is supposed to be the single. Do you think we can get away with ‘dicks’ on the radio?”

Richardson talked into the intercom. “Hell, you say ‘lousy whore’ up higher in the song,” he said. “If you can say ‘whore on the radio, you can say ‘dicks.’ I don’t care if you say pricks, say whatever you want.”

“I guess I’ll just try it,” Alice said.

“One thing,” Richardson said. “The third time around? Just after ‘little whore?’ After you’ve sung that line the third time, lay back a little on ‘again.’ You jumped it just a wee bit.”

Alice nodded. The tape rewound. “It’s only appropriate that I have it,” he said. I looked up. “The world’s largest TV,” he said. He began once more:

You ask me, babe. Can you work tonight?

It went on for well over an hour before Richardson said, “All right, sing that final ‘had again,’ and we’ll punch it onto the tape, and then we’ll keep that track and you can do another complete take on another track.”

In the other room, Alice sat down on a stool. “Is there any Excedrin in there?” he said. “My little frontal lobe operation is beginning to act up.”

The tape was already running. Richardson wanted a second complete version of the song, so he could blend Alice’s two voices together in the final mix. This time, through his earphones, Alice was hearing the instrumental tracks, his recorded voice, and his live voice. His voice was improving with wear; it was ragged and raw, but it was in tune, and the song was beginning to sound like a rock and roll hit. At one point Alice stretched out a line, going, “I just can’t beLEEEEEVE,” and Richardson motioned for Douglas to stop the tape.

Alice’s voice continued to come over the speakers for a few seconds, until he realized that Richardson wanted him to hold up.

“You’re beginning to sound a little Aunt Jemima-ish there,” Richardson said. “Let’s sell a few less pancakes and a few

more records."

Jack Douglas said, "Let's get him one of those Aunt Jemima rags for his head," and rewound the tape for the hundred and fiftieth time of the evening.

"You're working with a pro," Alice called to Richardson.

"Where is he?" Richardson said.

On the other side of the glass, Alice turned around and looked behind him. "I don't know," he said. "He was here before."

The tape rolled. But once again, when Alice got to the line Richardson was worrying about, he sang, "I just can't beLEEEEEVE..."

The tape stopped. Richardson said, "Alice, that I just can't beLEEEEEVE is really getting a little..."

"I want it a little... Afro-American," Alice said, and smiled.

"Well, let's not have it be 1845 Afro-American, let's have it 1970s Afro-American," Richardson said.

Alice widened his eyes and fanned his palms, a Stepin Fetchit parody. "Ah jest can'ts beLEEEEEVE," he said.

"It's getting a little broad, that's all," Richardson said.

Alice took his shirt off. "I need another beer, and some more Excedrin," he said. But the song was getting there; with the usual luck, within two months it would be as well known to the nation's teenagers as "America the Beautiful."

After three hours, Richardson motioned for Alice to come into the control room. Alice pulled the headset from his ears.

His hair was wet and matted down. He walked through the door and into the small room, and sat next to Richardson.

“We’ll play the second one back for you,” Richardson said. “I think there’s enough usable stuff on the two tracks that we can edit it and make something of it.”

“That’s the story of my life,” Alice said. “A series of tape edits.”

“Just trying to make you sound like a star,” Richardson said.

“Look, I realize I’m no Rod Stewart,” Alice said. “I’m just a kid working my way through rock and roll school, trying my best to learn…”

The session wore on for hours. Richardson was relentless. About eighty minutes into the taping of a song called “The Man with the Golden Gun,” he leaned toward the intercom and said, “Now Alice, may I ask you one thing. Quit trying to sound like Jack Jones, and put some gravel in your voice. I want it to sound mean.”

“I can try to sound like Mel Torme,” Alice said from the other side of the window. “My late Uncle Lefty was drunk one night in a night club, and be punched Mel Torme. Uncle Lefty got up out of his seat, and he ran toward Mel Torme, and he said, ‘You fucking faggot.’ And then he swung at Torme.” Alice swung at the microphone stand. “They threw Uncle Lefty out of the night club.”

“Also,” Richardson said, “when you sing the word ‘golden,’ don’t stretch it out. Cut it short.”

“Gol-den?” Alice said.

“That’s right,” Richardson said. “Gol-den. Gol-den.”

Richardson called for a break so that we could eat some carry-in roast beef sandwiches. A young man named Bob Gruen came into the studio. He was a photographer who had been hired to take photographs at the recent recording sessions in California. He was holding a stack of proofs, and Alice shuffled through them eagerly.

There were pictures of Alice posing pensively; pictures of Alice relaxing in the sun; pictures of Alice standing with the other members of the band; pictures of Alice walking down the street. There was one picture of Alice in a tank shirt with “Malibu 55 printed on the front, flexing his right bicep in the classic Muscle Beach pose. “Send this one to *Playgirl*,” Alice told Gruen.

Near the bottom of the pile was a dark, moody photograph of Alice, wearing white cutoffs and carrying a football, running alone on a wind-swept beach, his hair flying behind him. Alice held up the photograph for Richardson to see. “Kennedy, eh?” Alice said.

“Yeah,” Richardson said. “Ethel.”

Alice went back into the big room to sing again, but as soon as he started, the telephone light flashed in the control room. Jack Douglas answered it. “It’s for you, Alice,” he said. “It’s Cindy.”

Cindy Lang, Alice’s girlfriend of five years, was waiting for him to come home. They lived together in a penthouse apartment in the East Sixties, and Alice had been gone since dinner time. Now it was after midnight.

Alice returned to the control room, and went to the phone. “Uh huh,” he said. “Uh huh. Uh huh.” He was tapping his right foot, clearly impatient to be interrupted at the office. “I don’t know,” he said. “Another two or three hours, probably.

I’m busy right now. I’ll talk to you when I get home. Hey, I gotta get back to work. Listen, tomorrow, I want you to get some breakfast sticks... I want to go on a meat diet... yeah, just vegetables and meat... Okay, listen, leave the door unlocked. I’ll wake you... Hey, I just saw some pictures from California... you look good. You know that stuffed monkey we have? That’s what you look like. And I look like Tyrone Power. What? *Invasion of the Body Snatcher*s is on? What time? I got a TV here... Okay... See you later.”

Richardson motioned Alice toward the performers’ room. “I’m going to go get a cup for the V.O.,” Alice said. “I want you to know that because of you, Jack, I delayed my usual switch from beer to whisky. The change comes every night at eleven, and here it is almost one, and I’m still waiting to start on the V.O.”

“I wouldn’t want to be the one to make you deviate from your usual standard of behavior,” Richardson said.

Alice was gone for five minutes. When he returned, he said, “Sorry to be so long, but Ursula Andress was in the men’s room, and you know how she is about me.”

“Tell us when you’re ready to start,” Richardson said.

“Do you realize that Ursula Andress is thirty-eight years old?” Alice said. “I still think she’s the most beautiful woman in the world. I’d love to meet her. I’d crawl after her laundry truck. I bet you she thinks I’m the most beautiful man in the world, too. Either me or Ed McMahon.”

In the next few hours, Alice finished “Golden Gun” and started on a song called “Teenage Lament ’74.” At the end of the night, he was having trouble with just one phrase, which Richardson made him repeat again and again. Alice couldn’t

get it right. He tried it eight different ways, and none of them worked.

“Can he sustain that note just a little longer?” said Jack Douglas.

“Alice, try to hold it even longer,” Jack Richardson said.

“How’d you like the last way I tried it?” Alice said.

“The falsetto?” Richardson said. “To put it bluntly, it sucks.”

“I wonder what Paul McCartney would do under these circumstances?” Alice said. “Maybe I need a lung transplant. I remember when I first started singing, I tried to sound like McCartney. You know that old Beatles’ song, ‘I’m Down’? McCartney’s so amazing, I tried to sing that song like he did, I’d go, ‘You tell lies thinking I can’t see,’ and the veins on my neck would pop, my nose would bleed…”

“Ready to try that last word again?” Richardson said.

“If you’d like, you can speed the tape up or slow it down,” Alice said. “I can sing flat in any key.”

Finally, Richardson approved. He called Alice into the control room. “We going to listen to that last one play back?” Alice said.

“Yeah,” Richardson said, “and you’re going to analyze it in depth.”

“A regular William F. Buckley of rock,” Alice said. The song was played through.

“It’s fine until the very end, where you sound like you’re going to be sick,” Richardson said. “But I think I can fix that up. You go on home. What songs you want to do tomorrow?”

Alice leaned his head on the back of the couch. He thought for a while. “Let’s do ‘Hippo,’ ‘Hard Hearted Alice,’ and ‘Woman Machine,’ he said. “No, wait. Let’s do ‘Muscle of Love’ and save ‘Hard Hearted Alice’ till last, so I have a nice rasp in my voice.”

“Sweet dreams,” Richardson said.

Alice and I walked out of the control room, out of the Record Plant, through the lobby of the office building, onto Forty-fourth Street. It was 3:05 a.m. We were the only pedestrians on the street. Alice carried his bottle of V.O., now half empty, and an open can of Coca-Cola. We hailed a cab, and got in.

“That Richardson’s something, isn’t he?” Alice said.

“Kind of a perfectionist,” I said.

“I know, it’s unbelievable,” Alice said. “It’s a good thing you got to watch him before the day you go in to record your own part, so you know what to expect.”

I said that “The Man with the Golden Gun,” with its staccato guitars and dramatic breaks and military drums, sounded like the theme from a James Bond movie.

“That’s why I wrote it,” Alice said. “I saw *Live and Let Die* three times. And you know at the end of all the James Bond pictures, where they flash a credit on the screen saying which one’s going to come out next? Well, at the end of *Live and Let Die*, there was a line that said ‘Now in production: *The Man with the Golden Gun*.’ So I thought, great, I’ll write a song called ‘The Man with the Golden Gun,’ and I can have it out before the movie.” Alice smiled a wise smile. “The producers of the movie don’t know it yet,” he said. “But you tell me. What are they going to do? Their movie will still be in production, and already a song with the same title will be

in a million homes, it'll be playing on the radio every day. You talk about putting your foot in the door. This is like sticking your whole leg in the door, and then kicking the door in. They'll *have* to use it as the theme for the movie. Can't you see it? Boats fighting, and frogmen, and helicopters? Think of all those James Bond fans going to see their hero... and the movie starts, and *Alice Cooper* is singing the theme song!"

We were headed for my hotel, the Park Lane. Alice would ride on to his apartment from there. "Do you know Neal, our drummer?" Alice said. "Well, when we were out in California, Neal tried to write a song. He thinks it's going to be on the album. I don't know how we're going to break it to him. God! It's awful! You know when a record's moving up fast on the charts, *Billboard* will put a bullet next to it on the 'Hot One Hundred' list? Like, 'it's number eighteen, with a bullet?' Well, Neal's going to be the first singer in history to get a song with a parachute. 'Number eighty, with a parachute and a lead weight.' Neal's ancestors were German. We're going to keep letting him write songs for us, and not use them, and let him put out a solo album called *The Weak Link in the Super Race*."

Alice drank from the can of Coke. "You know who I met the other night?" he said. "Kurt Vonnegut. I was at a party, and there he was. I introduced myself and told him he was my favorite writer. I love his stuff. He's such a cynic. He asked me if I'd seen his new book, and I told him no, and he said he'd send me an autographed copy. I figured he was just bullshitting, like you do when you meet people, but he sent it. I got it in the mail. So I had our office send him all of our records, and boxes and boxes of Alice Cooper tee shirts and propaganda from our publicity office and all the rest."

We rode through the streets of New York. At Fifty-second Street and Sixth Avenue, we stopped at a red light. On the corner was a poster store and there, in the window, was a big color poster of Alice on stage, his face blackened with makeup, the boa constrictor wound around his neck. The light changed. The cab driver honked impatiently for the car in front of us to move on.

Alice looked out the cab's back window, at the poster store. "I want to get this right," he said. "I'm directly to the side of Mick Jagger, and right underneath 'War Is Unhealthy for Children and Other Living Things.'"

The cab moved past the light. Alice was trying to pour whisky from the V.O. bottle into the little hole on top of the Coke can, and when the driver slammed on the brakes in front of the Park Lane, the whisky went splashing onto the floor and the back seat of the cab.

"Don't tell the driver I did that," Alice said. "Say it was like that when we got in." His eight-hour working day was over. I said I'd see him at the studio, and I walked into the hotel. Alice sopped up the whisky with an old copy of the New York Post.

FOUR

“WHAT THE HELL have you got in your mouth?” Jack Richardson asked.

“Beef jerky,” Alice said. “I live on this stuff. If Davy Crockett could do it, I can do it.” He rolled back the cellophane wrapper on the piece of alleged meat, which looked like a dirty, old, gnarled stick. He read the ingredients listed on the label aloud: “Monosodium glutamate, sodium nitrite, sodium nitrate... I wonder if this beef jerky has ever seen a cow?”

“Is Cindy ever going to come over and watch one of the sessions?” Richardson asked.

“Maybe,” Alice said. “She doesn’t like our music that much.”

“Smart girl,” Richardson said.

“I think I’m about ready to sing,” Alice said. “I’ve got just enough snot in my throat to do this one.”

Back at the Record Plant. As I waited for Alice to complete his solo vocals, and for the arrival of my time in the recording room, I was beginning to get itchy. The more I watched Alice sing, the more I wanted to try it myself. The only fun in the building was going on in the big room, where Alice got to turn the lights down and try the songs as long as he needed. It looked easy and it looked pleasurable, and I was anxious to get in there and play rock and roll star.

The four of us—Alice, Richardson, Douglas, and myself—were together eight and ten hours a day. I had been in New York for four days. Other people moved briefly in and out of the studio: additional technicians, and musicians from adjoining rooms, and an occasional messenger from the Cooper office, or a delivery man from a neighborhood

delicatessen, bringing sandwiches and Cokes. Mostly, though, the cast of characters remained four.

Richardson and Douglas worked like open-heart surgeons to make sure the young purchasers of the new album would be able to detect not a hint of the minute electronic decisions that were being made at the Record Plant, but would play the record and envision only what they had been conditioned to believe was a band of twisted madmen, playing furiously together—it would not do to emphasize the fact that, so far, Alice and the rest of the Cooper group had not even been in the same room together during the manufacture of this album.

The precision with which Richardson and Douglas labored did not stem from any well of altruism. Richardson's Nimbus Nine Productions had been hired by Shep Gordon because the company had a track record of creating hit albums. Richardson and Douglas would be listed as co-producers on the *Muscle of Love* label, and Nimbus Nine would receive approximately fifteen cents for every copy of the album sold. For this reason it made a very tangible difference to the two of them whether *Muscle of Love* became merely a big hit, or a genuine giant hit, as *Billion Dollar Babies* had. The gap between a gold album—one million dollars' worth of records sold—and a platinum album—one million *copies* sold—was enough to mean important money to Richardson and Douglas. So I listened to Alice sing the nine songs from *Muscle of Love* for hour after hour, and I seldom could hear a real difference in his versions of the individual tunes. Richardson and Douglas could. Alice would complete a verse, and Richardson would say, "Did you hear him slide on the last syllable of 'amazing'?" and Douglas would nod, and they would order Alice to sing it again.

That this was only rock and roll music, and not a symphony, where the listener could easily pick out a minor flaw, did not seem to make Richardson and Douglas any looser in their attitude. That this was Alice Cooper rock and roll music, and not the product of the rockers who considered themselves classical geniuses with classical importance, did not seem to relax them, either. Both of them knew that many of the straight-ahead stand-up-and-play rock and roll bands sneered at Alice Cooper, derided the Cooper music, and laughed at the Cooper success. This lack of respect from the "serious" rock musicians was of no concern to Richardson and Douglas. They were well aware that there were literally thousands of groups all over the country who were far more technically skilled at making music than the Alice Cooper band. Technical skill was not what was in question here—at least not on the part of Alice Cooper. The technical skill that was significant was that coming from Richardson and Douglas, who knew that there was a certain Cooper sound that would be a hit, and who were determined to come out of the Record Plant with that sound on tape. They neither nodded their heads with the music, nor hummed along with the words. They bent over their console and quietly, slowly did their job.

Alice himself was another story. His apartment was only five minutes from my hotel, so we would usually ride back and forth to the studio together. The perverse viciousness of the Cooper stage show was absent; Alice, too, was here to do a job, and the horrid image he worked at on the road was not a part of that job this week.

Alice and I would ride through the Broadway theater district, which used to be the symbol of America's entertainment fantasies, to the Record Plant, where Alice would put in his day's work in an effort to remain the symbol of America's current fantasies. He talked easily and well, in a slightly

nasal voice varied in tone and volume; it was almost an actor s voice, aware of the impressions that can be transmitted audibly. The voice carried excitement and enthusiasm, in a non-flitty, controlled, Midwestern kind of way, and it was a contrast to the sometimes-standard rock and roll mumble that came so often from the laid-back stars who were afraid to show any emotion other than a profound, weary disinterest with the world.

Alice was anything but laid-back. He could not feign an aura of cool. He was unable to let thirty seconds of silence pass without throwing out some comment on the passing scene, or on what happened to him the night before, or on the continuing irony of his success. He was still turned on and tickled by the fact that he was one of the world's most recognizable names, an international star. He found it funny, and he found it a pleasure, and he showed it. That much was left of Vincent Furnier, the son of an Arizona fundamentalist minister, who had changed his name to Alice Cooper in the hope that the image of indefinite sexuality and horrendous violence would help separate his group from the tens of thousands of bands that were trying to make national names for themselves. Alice had grown up in Detroit, and then Arizona, a high school athlete and a writer for the school paper. He had been thrilled by the rock and roll stars on his family's television set, and he had convinced four of his high school friends to form a band with him. They had played around Arizona, and after graduation they all had gone on to one of the state's community colleges. But soon they quit, to pursue the rock and roll grail full time, and moved to California, where they got nowhere, until they met Shep Gordon. Then the drive had started—the use of the startling sexual and violent gimmicks in an effort to become a top worldwide attraction. Now that it had happened, Alice refused to be blase about it. He loved it, and it interested him, and he did not try to hide that fact. He refused to take

himself seriously; if he was going to play the role of a demented punk, at least he would allow himself the luxury of laughter. He had sold millions upon millions of records, but he held no illusions as to their profundity. He thought the idea of rock and roll "artists" was a howl, and he considered himself to be the prime example that he was right. On the way to the studio one evening, he handed me a piece of notebook paper, on which he had written, in pencil, the opening verse to the title song of *Muscle of Love*, about a girl who is the talk of the high school boys' locker room, where she is known as the "cream of the crop":

Joey took her to the matinee, said, God, she wouldn't stop...

"Notice how subtle my lyrics are?" Alice said. "Impressed by the finesse?"

I asked him how long it had taken to write the song.

"The song?" he said. "I wrote the words to the whole album in a day, while I was watching the game shows on TV. I mean, what's it take to write this stuff, anyway? The rest of the band gives me the instrumentals, and I do the words in a couple of hours. It's not exactly deathless prose."

He was aware that much of America took his sick, blood-soaked image very seriously indeed, which made him all the more willing to laugh at himself. It was one way to preserve his sanity. In the early days of the Cooper fame, I saw him come off stage after a show filled with ritual murder and gore, and sit down in the dressing room. There was a cockroach scurrying across the floor, and another member of the band walked toward it, ready to squash it under a boot. *"Don't!"* Alice screamed, with genuine emotion. The other musicians had stopped, and everyone in the room had looked at Alice, and had waited for an explanation. He had

shrugged and said, half embarrassed, “It’s a living thing. It didn’t do anything to any of us. There’s no reason to hurt it.”

This from the man who killed the babies every night. It was not exactly what his young fans had been taught to expect from him. Alice was proud of his intelligence and his sense of irony, and in the studio he did all he could to show that the job of playing the Alice Cooper role was just that—a job. A very enjoyable, profitable job, and one he was fully committed to keep up for the sake of his image. But in front of Richardson and Douglas, two men whose respect he wanted, he was always eager to demonstrate once again that he was not mistaking himself for the dangerous wretch named Alice Cooper who was being sold to the public.

The atmosphere in the studio was a strange mix of Alice’s determined lightheartedness and Richardson’s and Douglas’s equally determined sobriety. All three of them were professionals working at a peak, but Alice needed to allow himself at least an occasional spark of looseness to remind himself that this was, after all, rock and roll, and not the splitting of the atom. Richardson and Douglas had no such need. Thus, in the middle of a song which Alice had been trying to get down for more than two hours, he would let out a burp during the instrumental break. And Jack Douglas would say, “That’s the Budweiser; there’s probably more of them in the tracks undetected.” Jack Richardson would add: “We’ll find them.”

With all his efforts to prove that he could still be a wisecracking kid, however, Alice could never quite get away from the fact that he simply wasn’t like other twenty-five-year-olds any more. He would talk about London, and mention that when the band traveled there, they would book the entire Blake’s Hotel, where they would have twenty-four-hour room service, and the management would

keep the kitchen open all night for raids by the Cooper group—all of this paid for, of course, by the band's corporate arm, Alive Enterprises. And he would talk about an Italian restaurant in London that served "Veal ala Cooper," in honor of this boy from Arizona. Or he would say that he had met Jean Stapleton, of the television program "All in the Family," and that she had come up to him and said—here Alice would switch to an Edith Bunker imitation— "Oh, *Alice*, how can you stand to be around that snake? I *worry* about you." He would tell his stories, and no one would need reminding that being a rock and roll star offered certain differences, certain variations on the lives that the rest of us were used to leading.

One night the session finished early. Richardson and Douglas said that they had some work to do editing the tapes, and they would rather take care of that before recording any new vocals. Alice asked me if I'd like to go back to his apartment with him for a drink. He and the others considered the New York area their home now; in addition to the Manhattan apartment he shared with Cindy Lang, he had a house in Greenwich, Connecticut, as did everyone else in the band.

It was after eleven p.m., so Alice had switched to whisky. Since the first night of the recording sessions, there had not been a single moment when I had seen him without a beer, early in the night, or a V.O. and Coke, from eleven o'clock on. He carried his drink into the cab.

"There are times when I wonder about drinking so much beer," he said. "When I get up in the morning, the first thing I do is have two or three warm beers, just to give me an appetite. I never used to have an appetite in the morning, but now I do. The beer coats my stomach, or something. I used to drink a lot of whisky. That's why I won't start on the

V.O. until eleven. I was getting to be an alcoholic, and I got scared. The beer, I don't get drunk on it. It just acts like a tranquilizer, but it keeps me going, too. You really get to be an expert at it. You can blindfold me and put a tall can of Budweiser, a short can, a tall bottle, and a short bottle in front of me, and I can take a drink out of each and tell you the difference. It's the water. There's a difference in the water in each kind." He looked proud, knowing that he was in a way admirable for being a morning lush instead of a stereotypical rock and roll junkie. Alice, the living representation of American parenthood's worst nightmares, did not touch drugs.

The cab driver let us out half a block from Alice's apartment. Alice was wearing white jeans that had been raggedly cut off just below the hips, and a baseball warmup jacket. Even in that getup, though, he attracted few stares on the street. I had been out in public with him on a number of occasions since the beginning of the sessions—including a restaurant in Rockefeller Plaza for lunch one afternoon—and his appearance had caused very few heads to turn in curiosity, much less in recognition of the famous Alice Cooper. Alice out of context was just another young New Yorker trying to look freaky, trying to look like a rock and roll star. The recognition would come on tour. Here, where no one expected to see Alice Cooper, he was nearly invisible. Tonight one of the Process Church cult girls approached us, and it seemed for a moment that she might know who Alice was. But she only wanted to sell us a pamphlet.

Alice gave her a dollar, and after she had moved on he tossed the literature into a wastecan. "I always give them money," he said. "My first love was interested in that Process stuff. They remind me of her. That's when we were in California, first trying to make it. She was something. I thought she was really in love with me. Then I opened up

her datebook in her room one night. You should have seen it. Movie stars, rock and roll stars, actors, everybody. She even had Marlon Brando's name in there. She was seeing everybody. I thought she made the Brando thing up just to impress people, but once I was there, in her room, and there was a knock on the door of her apartment, and she went to answer it, and it was Marlon Brando. Think of me waiting for her to come back to the bedroom, and Marlon Brando's with her in the living room. I just left. I bet you she's married and living a normal life now."

We walked into the apartment building, a semi-new place indistinguishable from a hundred others just like it on the surrounding blocks. The doorman nodded politely at Alice in his white cutoffs. We rode the elevator to the top floor. Alice was not carrying any keys. He knocked. No answer. He knocked again. No answer. He began to knock continuously, and to shout "Cindy! Cindy! Cindy?"

"I'm in the bathroom," came a woman's voice. "I'm washing my hair. Wait a minute."

Two minutes passed. Then there was the sound of one lock turning, then a second and third lock. Cindy Lang opened the door. "If you'd take your keys with you…" she said. She was very pretty, in a clean, lively-eyed, non-backstage-sleazy kind of way. She was not one of the outrageous, purple-mascaraed, tri-color-haired girls you would encounter hanging around the lobby of an Alice Cooper tour hotel. She could easily have posed for a facial soap advertisement. Alice had met her five years before, when the band had been living in Detroit. Cindy had never heard of him, and did not make a habit of attending rock and roll shows. They had been together ever since; now, at twenty-three, she worked as a model in Manhattan, and she still seldom listened to music. She tried to read books at the pace of one a day

instead. Tonight, a writer from Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine had just left the apartment. He was doing a cover story about what it felt like to be Alice Cooper's girlfriend. Cindy's hair was wet from a shampoo.

"Did you look up the address of that driving range in Queens for me?" Alice said.

"Bad news," Cindy said. "It's only open till midnight every night. If you keep recording so late, you'll never make it until the album's done."

We went into the living room. Cindy brought Alice and me some whisky; she drank a Coke. A television was turned on, and the face of Mick Jagger appeared, featured in an advertisement. Jagger was painted up like a woman, wearing a filmy scarf, pouting seductively. It had been the Rolling Stones, on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1965, who had convinced Alice that he had to really do it, he *had* to quit simply thinking about it, he had to get out of Arizona and become a real rock and roll star instead of a member of a local high school band. He had seen the excitement that Jagger and the Stones, with their teasing, but still slightly-beneath-the-surface, androgyny, were conveying to their young audience, and he had thought "how cool it would be to make the Stones look like kindergarteners." Now, on Alice's TV set in Manhattan, Jagger was doing a whole Alice Cooper routine in an effort to sell a new album, but if Alice took note of the fact, he was concealing it. Instead, he said to Cindy, "Did I tell you who I saw on the airplane the other day? Jimmy Olson! The real one! The guy who played Jimmy Olson on the 'Superman' TV show! He was wearing a bowtie and everything. He was walking by my seat, and I knew him right away. I said 'Hey, Jimmy Olson!' And he put his finger to his lips and said, 'Shhh, I'm trying to live that down.'"

Cindy pushed Alice onto a mammoth square waterbed that served as the living room couch. She jumped after him, and kissed him. He said, “Hey, I’m too old for that stuff.”

“I know,” Cindy said. “Hard day at the office. I’m going to go finish washing my hair.”

The apartment was long and light, but not especially luxurious. Cases of Budweiser were stockpiled in the kitchen. Alice and Cindy’s bedroom was sparsely decorated and unfancy, the bedroom of any young couple, with the exception that on the wall, instead of paintings or posters, were Alice’s gold and platinum albums. “I’m supposed to not care about that stuff, so I confine that kind of ego gratification to my own room,” Alice said. “Those platinum ones mean that the record company brought in about five million dollars for the album. That’s a nice thing to look at just before you go to bed.” In the bathroom, on the wall opposite the plumbing fixtures, someone had taped perhaps a hundred small photographs. The pictures were small portraits, of the type used in high school yearbooks in the senior section. There was something faintly unsettling about these pictures, though, and it took about a minute of study to figure out what it was: All of the boys and girls in the pictures were unattractive. Not hideously ugly, or deformed. But the people were simply unfortunate in their physical appearances. These were the high school students who were never popular, who were envious of the star athletes and homecoming queens. The pictures evidently had been taken before the mid-’60s, for there were no longhairs. The boys all were wearing their best suit jackets, the girls all had set their hair, smiling fiercely in an effort to look nice for the yearbook. But it had not worked; they looked the same way they must have looked every day for years, and the total effect was stunning and depressing, much like the effect of a devastating Diane Arbus photograph. The pictures had been

taped up in the bathroom during a time when Alice was out on the road on tour. It had been done by some of his friends. They had thought that they would give Alice something to laugh at while he sat on the toilet.

We walked out onto a brick terrace that ran the length of the apartment, and stood looking out over Manhattan. New York seemed strangely silent. The autumn air had turned chilly after midnight, and neither of us were wearing jackets. There was no wind, and as we talked our words seemed louder than they really were—it caused us to lower our voices, as if we would wake the neighbors by continuing to speak in a normal tone.

“I’ll be interested in what the tour does to you,” Alice said. “I’ll tell you, the last one nearly drove me crazy. It was like a dream come true at first, all those packed houses every night, all those reporters and photographers in every city. But by the end it was getting to me. By the end, every time I’d hear a camera click, I’d cringe. It was an involuntary reaction. The clicking would start, and I would flinch. It was almost like the clicks were gunshots. I’m not sure what happened to me. Maybe it was just exhaustion. But the last couple of weeks of the tour, I’d have to run off stage during the show and throw up, then run back on like nothing had happened.

“But the thing I remember most is the clicking of the cameras, and how irrational I was about it, how much it disturbed me. I don’t think it was exactly fear—I think about being scared, and that’s not what it was. When I was little, when my family lived in Detroit, we used to have a show on TV called ‘Lights Out.’ It was one of those horror shows, and my mom and dad would turn all the lights out, and this face would come up on the screen all eerie—that would scare me so much. But the aversion I had to hearing those cameras

click was different than that. It was... it was physical. I'd get all these morbid thoughts."

We stood looking out at the skyline, saying nothing for a few minutes. Alice went into the apartment, and came back with a bottle of whisky. He poured some more into our cups, and set the bottle on the wall of the terrace.

"Would you ever go to a funeral?" he said. "I don't think I would ever go. I told Cindy that I'd never even go to her funeral. I told my mom and dad the same thing. I said that if I ever died before they did, that I wouldn't want them to go to my funeral. I'd want them to remember me when I was alive. The whole idea of people marching past an open casket and touching a dead person... I hate it, I'd never be a part of it."

And suddenly he was out of that mood. In the next sentence, he was talking about something completely different, and his tone was happy and light: "Touring can be such a terrific ego thing. When we first were trying to make it big nationally, right after we did our first album, *Pretties for You*, we had a date in Glenville, Michigan. We got to the motel, and there were no TVs in the place, and the hall only held two hundred people. I thought it would be a real turkey night. So we went out on stage, and the place was full—and I started singing, and *every kid in the front row* knew all the words to *Pretties for You*. Can you imagine what a feeling that was? I didn't even know all the words to *Pretties for You*, and these kids in that little town knew every song.

"Even now, we run into these great people we'd never think we'd meet. You remember that girl in *Oui* magazine a while back? That chick who was holding the clear plastic hose? When we were in Munich on a European tour, the record company had this party for us. The girls in Munich are the most beautiful in the world, and every girl who came into

the party was more beautiful than the last. I don't think anyone even got laid that night, they were all waiting for the next batch of even *more* beautiful girls to come in. Anyway, we're standing around trying to be cool about all of this, and here comes the girl from the *Oui* picture. She came to be with us! She was just wearing these... these fur pelts. My cigarette got hard. I've never seen anything like it."

It was getting cold, and we went back into the living room. A commercial for Doublemint gum was on the television screen. The Doublemint Twins were skipping and singing and smiling their way through a fresh, tree-dotted park. "I'd like to get a three-way with those girls," Alice said. "Wouldn't it be fun to go to bed with both of them at once. Just because they're so... corny."

It had taken him only three or four seconds to become mesmerized by the television again. He was sprawled on the waterbed-couch, his head close to the set. A Tang commercial came on. It prompted another Cooper soliloquy: "You know, I don't think we ever went to the moon. I think it was all done at the same studio where they filmed the Tang commercial. This commercial is perfect. Seeing the Tang commercial is no different from seeing the real moon telecast. How could we tell if they were lying to us? It could have been done at Disney studios, too. I'll tell you, if it turned out that we never really went to the moon, I would really respect this country. I mean, any country that sneaky and deceitful is all right with me; they could count on my support."

This was rock and roll night on national television. For the past few years, the networks and the sponsors had recognized the fact that if they programmed rock concerts during the late hours on weekends, they would make lots of money, and attract hordes of young viewers. The first late-

night rock special had been the premier edition of ABC's "In Concert" series, and it had featured Alice Cooper. The first "In Concert" had been so popular that imitators had been quick to appear, and tonight Alice found himself lounging around his living room, just like millions upon millions of other young Americans, watching the rockers on TV. What's more, it soon became clear, tonight's TV rockers were all showing signs that they recognized the eerie but definite appeal of Alice's sparkly, glittery, gimmicky, sexually ambivalent stage routine, and were trying to cash in on it themselves.

So Uriah Heep, an English heavy metal group, flashed onto the screen full of limp-wristed motions and Cooper makeup and histrionics. Alice laughed. "Off," he said to the TV. "That's an abuse of glitter."

He switched the channel. There was Mott the Hoople, another English group that had been around for years, but had made it big only after changing their act and recording a song called "All the Young Dudes," which had become something of an unofficial gay anthem. Alice, who had never slept with a male in his life and was, in fact, repulsed by the thought, said, "I heard that they were going to hire the Rockettes for a show they're doing in California. I'm serious," and turned the channel selector back to the first show.

Country Joe McDonald, who used to sing protest songs about Vietnam, appeared in a sequined tee shirt. And then came Marc Bolan, an English rock and roll singer who was a giant star in his own country, but who was looking for a way to finally make it big in America. Bolan minced across the screen, symbolically masturbated his guitar, beat the guitar with a bullwhip until smoke came out of it, stuck it between his legs, and hopped around the stage.

Alice Cooper, the elder statesman of outrage, stared at Bolan. “Oh, no,” he said.

On the screen, a pair of black women dancers materialized behind Bolan. The two women jumped and writhed and kicked in unrelieved frenzy while Bolan tossed glitter into the audience and sang a song called “Get It On (Bang a Gong).”

Cindy Lang walked into the living room, a towel around her hair. “Come here, quick,” Alice said. She walked over to the TV set. The two black dancers were flinging their arms and legs about, flailing in all directions, seemingly on the verge of going berserk.

“It looks like someone put some LSD in those Negroes’ watermelon,” Alice said.

Just prior to midnight on the evening before I was scheduled to record, Shep Gordon arrived from Los Angeles. He had been dealing with Warner Brothers on matters of distribution and publicity and promotion and advertising for *Muscle of Love*; the work he had done in California would be just as vital to the album’s success as the work going on at the Record Plant. Gordon came into the control room carrying his Louis Vuitton briefcase. He looked tired. As soon as he sat down, he began going through some papers from the briefcase.

Alice stopped singing and walked into the control room to say hello to Shep. “What do you think about having the Pointer Sisters do some backgrounds on two or three songs?” Alice said.

Shep shrugged. “They’re in L.A.,” he said. “It’s a question of whether it’s worth the money to fly them here.”

“They’re hot,” Alice said.

“Okay, I’ll think about it,” Gordon said. “I can get Ronnie of the Ronettes, and I think maybe I can get Liza Minnelli. If Elton John’s in town, I’ll see about that, too.”

Alice talked animatedly about the songs on the album. Shep said nothing. He was paying Richardson to get the album right, and he assumed that Richardson was doing his job. Alice talked on and on, about saying “dicks” in “Never Been Sold Before,” and about his plans for “The Man with the Golden Gun,” and about all the things that had happened during the recording sessions. Gordon nodded and studied his papers. Although there was only a three-year age difference between Alice and Shep, the atmosphere was very much one of a little boy jabbering to his daddy who has just come home from work.

“Did we get our gold albums from Australia yet?” Alice asked.

“I heard they were in,” Gordon said. “I’ll check in the morning.”

Jack Richardson called from behind the console: “Are we going to get our gold album for producing *Love It To Death*, Shep?” *Love It To Death* had been Alice Cooper’s first gold album, and Richardson wanted one for the Nimbus Nine offices in Toronto.

“From what country?” Gordon said.

“From America,” Richardson said.

“You should have had it a year and a half ago,” Gordon said.

“Are you sure?” Richardson said. “When did it go gold? Are you sure it even went gold?”

“I can tell you the exact date it went gold,” Gordon said. “I bought the last two hundred and fifty thousand albums to make it gold. My banker calls me up and says, ‘What’s this check for five hundred thousand dollars?’ and I tell him relax, relax, it’s an investment.”

“Jesus,” said Richardson.

“I’ll see about your gold album tomorrow,” Gordon said. “And in the meantime, did the office call you about the quadrex mix on *Billion Dollar Babies*?”

“You’ll have it the first of November,” Richardson said.

“We need it sooner than that for Christmas,” Gordon said.

“The twenty-first, at the very earliest,” Richardson said. “I’ll mix it as soon as I get the final mix on this album done.”

Alice was just about finished with the last solo vocal on the album. The next afternoon, we would sing the backgrounds. “Come in and watch us sing tomorrow,” Alice said.

“I got to do my singing in the office,” Gordon said.

“Yeah, I wouldn’t trade jobs with you for the world,” Alice said.

Gordon was studying the clauses in a contract. He did not look up. “Oh,” he said. “And I just went out and bought myself a snake.”

FIVE

While my room-service eggs were cooking, I sang in the shower. I sounded quite good, I thought. As a matter of fact, I had been quietly confident all week long that I would be the best thing on the *Muscle of Love* album. Frequently, while Alice was recording his vocals at the Record Plant, I would sing along in the control room. This was easy enough, because with the music booming out of the speakers at top volume, there was no way that Richardson or Douglas could hear my own unamplified singing. It was similar to the effect you get when you're riding in a jet and the noise is high: you can sing or talk and no one will hear you, but if you stick your fingers in your ears, your voice comes through clearly. So, hunkered down on the couch in front of the control console, I had been accompanying Alice on a regular basis, and the only times I had been caught were when Douglas would suddenly shut off the instrumentals tape without warning, and the control room would instantly go silent—except for me, as I would sail along into the next line of the song. When this happened, I would immediately switch my singing voice into a loud, guttural growl, and Richardson and Douglas would assume that I was either clearing my throat, or in the middle of an ugly coughing jag.

So as I sang in the shower in my bathroom at the Park Lane, I felt I was ready. I had this recurring vision: in a few hours I would go in to sing the background vocals, and after one or two verses, Richardson would come rushing into the big room and ask me if I had ever sung professionally before. "Naw," I would say. "Just around the house, or along with a car radio. Never for money." He would shake his head, and say that he had never heard such a commercial rock and roll voice. "Yeah," I would say shyly, "I guess I did always know the magic of my voice." Richardson would beg me not to go back to Chicago and my old way of life after the Cooper

sessions. He would ask me if he could produce a solo album for me. “Sounds good,” I would say, “but I can’t hardly play anything. Couple of chords on a guitar is all. I wouldn’t know nothing about getting a band together.” Leave it to him, Richardson would say. He would take care of bringing my backup group together. I would think for a minute. Then I would look up, a half smile on my face, and say, “Yeah. Sure. Let’s do it.” Alice would be overhearing all of this, and of course he would be hurt. It would show on his face. But what the hell, this was a business. I knew it, and Richardson knew it, and Alice surely knew it too. I would look over at him and shrug. He would shrug back. We would both know the score—we would both know that he was a glittery freak-rock oddity who was making it on shock value alone, while I was the real thing, a rock and roll singer who could move people to ecstasy or tears with the smallest inflection of my voice, the merest shift in tone or volume. Richardson would ask me if I had been thinking about any ideas in the way of a title for my first album, and I would shrug again, and say I did have a little something in mind—what did he think of *Mr. Rock and Roll*? He would say he thought that was a fine title, a very great title in fact, and that he couldn’t wait until he was done with *Muscle of Love*, so that we could get started with the preliminary tracks for *Mr. Rock and Roll*. I would go over to Alice, and ask if I could speak to him, privately. He and I would go off to a corner of the studio, and I would lay an arm on his shoulder in manly fashion, and tell him that I knew what he was going through, I knew that it must hurt to see this excitement in Richardson that he had never seen before, but that he shouldn’t worry, I would gladly fulfill my commitment to sing backgrounds on *Muscle of Love*, and that I wouldn’t even charge him for it, that I would always have a fond spot for him in my heart, because after all, he was kind of responsible for all of this happening, in an indirect, insignificant kind of way. And I hoped that no matter what, Alice and I could always remain friends. This is

a tough business, I would tell him, and there was no reason to let a business decision like Richardson's get between me and Alice. He would agree, he would say that he knew that I was right, but there would be no life in his voice, and he would slink off to open a beer and watch his pitiful little television set, while Richardson would eagerly tell me about his plans for my *Mr. Rock and Roll* album, and I would coolly nod, knowing that fate always catches up with you sooner or later...

My food arrived. I ate quickly; today's session was scheduled to start in the afternoon, and I didn't want to be late in case I was supposed to sing right away. I took a cab to the Record Plant, and I was the first one there for the Cooper session. I waited around the lounge area. There were gold records screwed to the wall, in recognition of million-sellers that had been made at the Record Plant: the Raspberries' "Go All the Way" single, Alice's *School's Out* album, Don McLean's *American Pie* album. Mountain's *Climbing* album. A telephone, for the use of musicians recording at the Record Plant, was at the end of a benchlike couch; the phone had been wired so that the musicians could not make long distance calls. Next to the phone was a wooden Dutch shoe, bolted down, meant to be used as an ash tray.

I walked into our studio. When we had left the night before, it had been filthy and cluttered with cigarette butts and food wrappers and bits of sandwiches and discarded Budweiser cans and pickles and plastic spoons and newspapers and paper cups and whisky bottles. Now the rooms were spotless, and the studio had the sterile look of an abortion clinic. This was one of the services the Record Plant was known for. There is a negative psychological effect involved in returning to a studio where previous songs have been completed, and to find the garbage that was left there during the earlier recording sessions. It is a better feeling to

start fresh, with the memories of the hours spent recording the other songs collected only one place—on the tapes.

In our studio, a young woman named Jody Smith was singing “Streets of Laredo.” She had needed to do some work on her tape, and the Record Plant had been able to slip her in just prior to the Alice Cooper session. She had a clear, pretty voice, but she knew that she was running late, and she was nervous. Her attitude toward the studio was visibly different from Alice’s. She was aware of the price, and the expensive equipment, and the difficulty of booking time. She seemed slightly intimidated. Miss Smith was not a star, and to her the Record Plant represented everything she was reaching for. Alice could flop on the couch in the studio and watch TV until he felt like singing again; Miss Smith could not; her awareness of her surroundings prevented it. She kept glancing at a clock, edgy because her time was up and she still was not done.

Alice walked into the control room and sat on the couch. He was eating a sandwich. It was 2:05 p.m., and the Cooper session had been scheduled to begin at two o’clock. Miss Smith called her manager, a pale, worried-faced man named David, into the big room and whispered something to him. David, who was wearing a gray suit, looked through the picture window at Alice. Miss Smith whispered some more, and David came into the control room.

“Excuse me,” David said. “Are you Alice Cooper?”

“Yes, and this is my meatball sandwich,” Alice said.

“I’m awfully sorry we’re taking so long,” David said. “But Jody is almost done with this song, and if we could just have a few more minutes…”

“Sure,” Alice said. “I’ve got to eat this sandwich and drink a few beers before I can sing anyway. Take all the time you need.”

But with the appearance of Alice, Jody Smith became too clutched to continue. David asked the engineers for a replay, but Jody said, “No, no, we have to go, we can do it later,” and within five minutes she was gone. The rock-oriented engineers were chuckling over the idea of her singing “Streets of Laredo”; they said that just before we arrived, she had done “High Noon.” Alice did not laugh. A few days earlier, he had told me that the only two songs he wished he had written were “My Funny Valentine” and “The Lady Is a Tramp”; in his apartment, he tended to play only Burt Bacharach albums.

Jack Richardson was sitting at the console, consulting his charts and deciding which backgrounds to do first. Michael Bruce arrived. He was a guitar player in the Alice Cooper group, and he had not seen Richardson or Alice since California, when he had recorded his instrumentals on the tape. It was his music that Alice had been singing along with all week, and now he was here to help sing backgrounds. “Ooooooooaaaaaaaaaa!” he sang, opera style, as he came through the door. He leaned over the console, and said, “Let’s hear some.”

“Wait a fucking minute,” Richardson said. “Let me do my business.”

“What kind of business are you in?” said Bruce.

Michael Bruce was chunky and full-faced, with long, slightly frizzy black hair. At twenty-five, he had the look of a drunken altarboy. He had a thick, muscular build, and carried himself like a combative guard on a schoolyard basketball team. He was quick to smile, but the smile was

not mirthful; he was a natural cynic, and his cynicism had increased as of late because of the growing personal fame of Alice. Bruce wrote most of the melodies for the albums, and in the early days he had been a lead vocalist. Now, with Alice himself the recipient of such astounding international publicity, Bruce was aching to gain some of the same individual fame for himself. He knew, though, that for the present, the success of the Alice Cooper group as a whole would determine his own personal success, and he also knew that Shep Gordon's theory was to push Alice as an individual—and that Gordon's theory had, unarguably, worked perfectly so far. So Bruce was going along with the plan.

Richardson told Douglas to play the tape of "Hard Hearted Alice." It came through the control room speakers almost immediately. The sound was soft and melodic, the closest thing to a ballad on the *Muscle of Love* album. It picked up a harder beat halfway through, and finished as a regular rocker. It told Alice's own story, in the most melodramatic terms: the terrible problems of living "coast-to-coast," with life "as free as a jailbird" and a "mind scrambled like eggs." It did not mention Manhattan penthouses or Warner Brothers royalties.

Richardson let the song play all the way through. When it had finished, Mike Bruce said, "I like it, how much is it, and what's the name of the group?"

"Wind it back," Richardson said to Douglas. "Now, you four. Go on in there."

The four of us were Alice, Mike Bruce, myself, and a thin, sad-eyed young pianist named Bob Dolin, a studio musician hired by Shep Gordon to play on the Alice Cooper albums and to be one of two non-Cooper musicians on stage during the tour, to give the band a fuller in-concert sound. We

opened the six-inch-thick wooden door to the bigger room, and marched in. “You’ve just passed the point of no return,” Mike Bruce said to me. “You’re in this thing now no matter what.”

Douglas followed us. He plugged four headsets into a wall outlet, and then spooled out the wires from them, until they reached the area around the microphone. He handed each of us a headset. There was an empty electronic hum coming through the earphones.

I sat on a stool. The lights in our room were dim, and the control room was also darkened. All I could make out on the other side of the glass were the multi-colored lights blinking from the tons of equipment, and the gray forms of Richardson and other technicians.

The room we were in was not unlike a scaled-down gymnasium. It was long and tall, and it had the feel of performance to it: you were supposed to *do* something in here, this was not a sitting room or a technicians’ area. There were a few soft-colored lights behind us, but other than that, it was like dusk in the room. This was to set the mood for singing. A brightly lit office might be fine for a secretarial pool, but it is hard to shed your inhibitions and try to make music in the center of a fluorescent glare. The floor was covered with a dirty yellow high-shag carpet. Behind us was a bar-like, U-shaped piece of furniture, in the center of which was stored some extra stools, wiring, and electronic gear. We were standing perhaps only one fifth of the way back into the room. The long space behind us, I had been told, made this particular studio good for an echo effect. On a black music stand in front of us were some of Alice’s pencil-written lyrics, which, when typed up and copyrighted, would bring in huge sums of money to the publisher, Ezra Music. Ezra was Shep Gordon’s middle name.

“Can you hear me?” Richardson’s voice said in my headset. “Can all of you hear me?”

I nodded. I looked to my left. The others were all nodding too.

“Okay, I’ll play it through for you once,” Richardson’s voice said. “Everyone just relax. Just listen this time.”

“Hard Hearted Alice” came through, loud. As good as the quality of sound had been in the control room, it could not match the effect that I was now hearing through the earphones. The music filled my head. Every intricate change in Alice’s voice, or in the instrumentals, was magnified a thousand times. Suddenly Alice’s voice sounded strong and sure and professional. My mouth felt dry. I looked through the glass. The figures at the console were reaching for buttons and knobs. The song ended.

“Okay, can we run it down, please?” Richardson said. “There are two places in the song where I want you four to sing. On the tape, you will hear Alice sing a chorus that goes ‘hard hearted Alice, is what *we* want to be, hard hearted Alice, is what you want to see.’ The word ‘see’ is a falsetto, stretched out. The chorus appears twice. I want you to sing it twice, along with Alice’s voice. I want it to sound like a five-part harmony. Does everyone understand?”

Michael Bruce stepped up to the microphone and spoke. His voice came into my headset. “Is it ‘hard hearted Alice, is what we want to be, hard hearted Alice is what we want to see’?” Bruce said.

“No, Mike,” Richardson said. “The last part is ‘what you want to see.’ It changes. First is ‘what we want to be,’ and then is ‘what you want to see.’”

The others moved toward the microphone. I got up from the stool and stood next to them. I did not know how close I was supposed to be to the microphone, or how loud I was supposed to sing. I felt very foolish, trying to keep “what we want to be” and “what you want to see” straight in my mind, but at the same time I felt a heart-pounding nervousness. As friendly as all of this was, it was still business, and no one was forgetting it. Beneath the looseness was the indisputable thought that a million dollars and more was resting on the success of this album.

“Let’s try it,” Richardson said.

My throat had turned to sunbaked cement. The three singers next to me were all sipping from cans of beer, to keep their voices wet. I thought about going out to the refrigerator to get one, but then the song began to play in my headset.

The four of us stood still. I looked to see if anyone was moving or tapping their feet to the music. No one was. We must have looked like four men waiting for a bus. Ten seconds before our part, the other three bent closer to the microphone, and I joined them. We made four-way eye contact, and began nodding our heads to keep time. Then, just as Alice’s solo voice started to sing it on the tape, we all joined in:

Hard hearted Alice, is what we want to be, hard hearted Alice, is what you want to see—eeeeeeeeee...

I couldn’t hear my voice. In my headset was the sound of five voices: Alice’s on tape, and mine, Bruce’s, Dolin’s, and Alice’s “live.” But it was all so loud, and it was happening so fast, that I couldn’t pick out my own, to see if I was close to being in tune, or if I was even singing the words in the right places. Or if there was anything coming out of my throat at all.

There was a long instrumental break, and then the eye-catching and nodding began again. We sang our second part, and Richardson shut off the tape.

“That,” said Jack Richardson’s voice in the headset, “is the best five-part harmony I ever recorded.”

I beamed. Maybe I was going to get to do my *Mr. Rock and Roll* album after all. I looked at the other three. They were laughing. Richardson had been kidding.

“Listen to it,” Richardson said. Douglas pushed a button, and the playback came through our headsets.

We were awful. Blown words, sloppy phrases, and a flat, off-key voice that sounded vaguely familiar to me.

“Hi, I’m Guy Cringe,” said Mike Bruce.

Alice talked into the microphone. “Can we have a little bit more of us in the headsets, and a little more echo?” he said. Richardson nodded, and Douglas reached for the board.

“Let’s go again,” Richardson said.

We did. Alice’s suggestion made it easier to hear what we were doing; with the tape volume turned down, and the “live” volume turned up, I could discern the individual voices. But it was still like listening to a record. Just because I could identify my own voice didn’t mean that I could do anything about it. Now I could tell when I was wrong, but I could not associate the sound of my voice coming through the headset with whatever it was that was coming out of my mouth. The sound in the headset just seemed to *be there*, a part of the background, and even though I knew that I was hearing it at the precise moment I was singing it, the connection still was not right. I was doing the same thing I

had been doing all my life: I was singing along with the record. But this time one of the voices on the record was a bad voice, and it so happened that the voice was mine. Still, even though intellectually I understood this, emotionally I would not accept it. A part of me firmly believed that by the time my voice got to the headset, it might be faintly off key; but that when it left my mouth, it was perfectly fine. Something was happening to it between my throat and the earphones, and I began harboring a sneaking suspicion that the fault lay with the Record Plant's malfunctioning equipment.

Fortunately for me, I wasn't the only one sounding sour. On the playback, I concentrated mostly on my own mistakes, but I was hearing enough of the others' voices to know that they weren't singing at top form, either. Next to our wobbling harmony, Alice's solo voice on the tape sounded like Beverly Sills. Which is exactly why Richardson had spent more than three hours when Alice had recorded his vocals for the four minute and fifty second song: to eliminate the mistakes. The result was that Alice, who had a reputation among rock and roll singers as a purveyor of wanton cacophony, seemed to have the smoothness of a symphony as his taped voice was fed into our headsets, and as we tried in vain to match it.

Again and again, Richardson had us sing the lines. I lost track of time. The air-conditioned room suddenly felt very hot, and I began to perspire through my shirt. When I had watched Alice record, the pace had seemed very leisurely, almost wasteful. Now it seemed like a breathless basketball game. We would finish singing the two verses, the tape would stop, Richardson would say it was better, but not good enough, and we would hear the tape whirring backward. Jack Douglas would stop it ten or fifteen seconds in front of our part, and we would do it again. At first, I held back my

voice, on the theory that if I was screwing the record up, I should keep quiet; then I figured the hell with it, that's Richardson's problem, if you're going to do the thing, do it, and I started to sing as though I was drunkenly roaring "The Star-Spangled Banner" at a baseball park. It even began to be fun. Once I saw that the other three weren't concerned, that they knew Richardson would have us do it until it was right, I was able to relax a little too.

At one point Richardson said there was a phone call for Mike Bruce in the control room, so we got to take a break. I was thirsty for a beer, and as I started to follow Bruce to the door, I almost tore my head off because I had forgotten to remove the earphones. When I returned, Alice was talking to Bob Dolin.

"Come on, Bob, please?" Alice said. "*Please?* Just *once*? You know what I want to hear. Play it one time."

"Aw, Alice, I don't want to play that," said Dolin, who had the sensibilities and artistic temperament of a concert pianist, instead of what he was, which was the hired keyboard man for the world's most consciously-repulsive rock and roll band.

"Just once, and I'll leave you alone," Alice said.

"All right," Dolin said. "Once." And he walked over to the piano in the studio and played the theme from "Captain Kangaroo." Bruce returned, and we put our headsets back on. "Gentlemen," Richardson said, "let us continue." The song began, and Alice accidentally dropped a box of candy on the floor. "I sing better when I haven't dropped my Good 'n Plenties," he said. He picked up a white card that had fallen from the candy box. "'Which travels faster, heat or cold?'" he read. "Ponder that one while we sing this song."

Our verses came up, and we sang them.

Alice read from the card again. “Heat,” he said, “because you can catch cold.”

We started to sound not so terrible together. Doing it so often gave us the chance to try different ways of matching one another’s voices, and it seemed to be working. Alice and Bruce and Dolin were making an effort to help me out. They were adjusting their voices to blend with mine, and the resulting harmonies began to sound increasingly musical with each playback of the tape. I was beginning to feel more confident. At first I took every critical comment by Richardson or Douglas as directed at me alone; their voices interrupted the singing and burst into my headset, and I dreaded each new observation on the shortcomings of the performance. But after a while I realized that we were all hooked up to the same intercom, and that the producers were advising the other three singers too. After all, I had not been singled out by name; maybe I wasn’t doing so badly, at that. I was singing away and just getting over my nervousness when the voice of Jack Douglas came through the headset.

“Does any of you know which one of you is extremely flat on the final word?” he said. He was talking about the stretched-out “be,” which ended as a high, piercing falsetto.

There was a momentary silence. The four of us looked at one another. No one spoke. I knew that each time I had reached for that difficult, lilting note, I had lost track of my voice, and that I had only hoped I was matching the others as the falsetto faded out.

“Any idea which of you it is?” Douglas said.

I raised my hand and motioned to the figures behind the console, through the window in the darkened control room. “I have a guess,” I said.

“Then drop back a little on the falsetto,” Douglas said. “When you get to that final word, let your voice trail off. Don’t struggle to make the note.”

I knew that I had no reason to be embarrassed, that I should have expected a moment like this, and worse. Everyone in the studio knew that I had never recorded before, and that I was going at it as an amateur who was likely to blow parts of the song. But still, I felt myself flushing. To hide my awkwardness, I pulled a sheaf of paper from my back pocket, and pretended to be making notes, reasserting my role as an outsider, a reporter who was above all this silliness. But after a few seconds I shook my head, tossed the notes to the carpet, and kicked an empty beer can across the room. The other three singers broke into laughter, and stepped back from the microphone.

“The pen is mightier than the sword,” said Mike Bruce.

Alice came over and held his hand above my head. “Let’s hear it for contestant number one,” he said. “The number in Cleveland is…”

“What?” said Mike Bruce. “No calls for contestant number one? Sorry, Bob…”

“How can I go home again?” I said.

Richardson’s voice came through the headset: “You’ve failed in the Big Apple, after you told all of your friends you were going to make it.”

And then came the familiar sound of the tape winding back to the beginning of “Hard Hearted Alice.” We started

working at it again. This time I stopped singing at the point where the final falsetto phrase began. During the tape rollbacks, the other three singers talked about whether they should sing it in “D” or in “E”; I had no idea what the difference was, and I just tried to match their voices, and go wherever they went. Finally, Richardson was satisfied. He called us into the control room and played the song back. Then he sent Bruce and Dolin back to record another set of harmonies; my part was done until later in the day, when I would work on a second song.

Alice and I sat on the couch in the control room, and watched the other two do their new part. The phone light flashed. Douglas answered it, then put his hand over the mouthpiece and said, “Alice? Were you expecting a call from a guy named Robert W., from NBC radio? He says he’s supposed to interview you.”

“Oh, yeah,” Alice said. “Here, I’ll talk to him.” It was time for Alice to cut away from the business routine of the studio, and to go into his luxuriating superstar role. He took the phone.

“Hi, man,” Alice said. “Hi... Robert W.?... Can you hear me?... This is Alice Cooper, calling from Puerto Rico... Yeah... we’re out shark fishing, man...The sharks are big, because we’re using tuna for bait... do you know how hard it is to get a call through to the United States from here?... it took an hour to make the connection... Yeah, it’s great... lotta sun... the ocean is really nice... this is such a beautiful boat we’re on…” There was no laughter in the control room as Alice, in Manhattan, told the NBC radio audience what fun it was to be a rich star fishing off the coast of Puerto Rico. It was all part of the game; everyone understood it.

The day began to feel slow. There was trouble with some of the equipment, and a new machine had to be wheeled in

from another studio down the hall. Richardson took hours with Bruce and Dolin; the time, which had seemed to go so quickly when I was recording, now downshifted to a crawl. I knew why: I had the bug. I had had a taste of recording an album, and now I couldn't stand to hang around the studio and watch other people do it. It was irrational, but I began to resent every foot of tape that rolled without my voice on it. I noticed that Alice had disappeared. I found him in a back office at the Record Plant, watching another portable TV set. I told him that I had been pacing and fidgeting ever since we had stopped recording. "I know," he said. "We all get that way. It's no good to be around there unless you're working. That's why I come back here. It doesn't do any good to look at the clock and make yourself nervous about when your time is coming up again. It's better to just go somewhere else and wait until they call you."

During one stretch of time when the equipment was being shifted, I sat down with Richardson and asked him about his job. I told him that I had been amazed at the degree of precision he demanded in the recording process. I asked him what the reasoning was for spending three and four hours on a thirty-second phrase; what percentage of teenage listeners did he think would notice the difference between the first version, and the last version that he came up with hours later?

"Zero percent," he said. "If you want to talk about it that way. I mean, no one would write letters to the record company and complain about the tone of Alice's voice on one phrase. And no one would write letters about that chorus that you guys sang, even if I had left it the way you sang it the second or third time. I don't expect people to hear differences like that. It's not their job. But I can hear the differences. That's what I'm paid to do. I'm trying to give the album an overall sound, and the way you do that is to

make sure that you get what you want all the way through, on every part of every song. And that doesn't necessarily mean that you're looking for the traditional flawless voice. With Alice, it's almost the opposite. You remember the other day, when I told him to stop trying to sound like Jack Jones? I wasn't being facetious, you know. With Alice I'm looking for a very rough, raw, primitive sound. The purpose of all the hours we spend is to get that sound. When I have him do a verse over, it could very well be because he sounded too 'good,' in the normal sense. We want to give the impression that Alice just walked into the studio and laid down a mean, raunchy rock and roll track, and then walked out. But that takes a lot of time, to create that impression.

"So even though the people who buy the records can't hear the individual components of the songs, I can hear them. In that sense, I'm really making the album for myself, and for my peers in the producing and engineering field. There does come a point, of course, when you've got to make a decision about when to stop spending money for studio time. That's when you decide what can really be heard and sensed by the record buyers. It's always a gamble. I have to decide how far to go, when it's a matter of spending, say, twenty thousand dollars on the one hand, or thirty thousand on the other hand, for the production of a record.

"That's why there has to be a combination of looseness and discipline in the studio. We have to keep it somewhat easygoing, because we aren't going to get anything if the musicians are tight and edgy because we're pushing them too hard for time. But we simply can't waste too much time, either. It's too expensive, and we have a date we have to get the record in the stores, and we just can't afford to throw studio time away. Whatever image the Alice Cooper band wants to project in their stage show, that's fine, that's their business. But my business is getting the record made, and

they’re aware of that. You remember Brian Christian, don’t you?”

Christian was the engineer for the *Killer* album. I had met him in Chicago, on the same day I first met the band, when they were recording “Dead Babies.” Christian was a fierce-looking man who favored a closely cropped haircut and Banion sport shirts. He looked more like Dick Butkus than like an essential participant in the rock and roll world.

“For three days,” Richardson said, “Brian Christian could not bring himself to call Alice ‘Alice.’ He could not call a man ‘Alice,’ it wouldn’t come out of his mouth. It was always ‘hey, you,’ or ‘tell the singer,’ or *anything* but ‘Alice.’ But then Brian figured out that Alice was a pro, that Alice knew what we were trying to do in the studio, and from then on it was fine.”

Around dinnertime, a young man in his mid-twenties named Richard appeared at the studio. Richard was accompanied by two girls. Richard’s father was the owner of a major New York department store, and Richard had used his access to merchandise and other gifts as a means to gain proximity to the Alice Cooper band. By now, most of the members of the band considered Richard little more than a male groupie; Richard would hang around, and bring girls he wanted to impress, and insinuate himself into conversations, and generally be ubiquitous and hovering and overbearing. The Alive Enterprises office staff thought of him as a grating pest, and dreaded the sound of his voice on the telephone. Lately, Richard had started to send his friends around to the Alive offices, to pick up free records in Richard’s name. The office staff was beginning to turn these people down, but Richard did not take the hint. Tonight he brought his two girls into the little office where Alice was watching television. Alice nodded hello, and then tried to go back to

the TV. But Richard wanted to talk. All of Richard's talk was about the band, and the recording sessions, and which guitar player Richard thought was getting cheated out of songwriting credits on the album, and which other guitar player Richard thought was receiving too many songwriting credits, and which songs Richard thought were less than good. Richard apparently did not notice that his audience did not want to hear his monologue. Even the two girls began to lose interest. Richard went on and on, and then he said, "Maybe I'll come over to your apartment tomorrow, Alice."

"Gee, I don't know if I'll be there," Alice said.

"That's okay, I'll call you in the morning to find out," Richard said.

"Yeah, okay," Alice said. "The only thing is, I'd give you my number, but I don't know what it is. I never call there, and I have a really bad memory for things like that."

"That's okay, I already have it," Richard said. "Cindy gave it to me." His girls said that this was getting "slacky," that they heard Elton John was in town, and that they wanted to go to Max's Kansas City. Richard and the girls walked out of the office. Alice watched them leave.

"That Cindy better have given him a wrong number," Alice said. "He's so o-b-n-o-x-i-o-u-s. I've got to get over being nice to people I don't like. I wish I could be mean. I'd feel so much better if I could tell people I can't stand to just get away from me."

In the studio, Richardson was still at it. Gail Rodgers, Shep Gordon's personal secretary, had come in with gray folders for Alice and Mike Bruce. On the front of the folders were labels, prepared on an electric typewriter:

Westheimer, Fine, Berger and Co.
Certified Public Accountants
Alice Cooper Inc. Financial Statement

In addition to bringing Alice and Bruce a report on their current fiscal position, Gail had a message from Shep for Richardson and Douglas. Liza Minnelli would be coming to the studio in a day or two, to do a quick background chorus with Alice. The wire services had been informed; hopefully, they would assign photographers, and photographs of Oscar-winner Minnelli singing along with noted pervert Cooper would be sent to the world's newspapers, thus ensuring that the phrase *Muscle of Love* would be planted in the international consciousness before the record even reached the stores. But the Pointer Sisters could not come to New York, Gail reported; they had agreed to sing backups for the album, but would be unable to leave Los Angeles long enough to come to the Record Plant. So Gordon had decided that Richardson and Douglas should lug the tapes to California, get the Pointers on a couple of songs at a studio out there, and then catch a red-eye flight back to New York, in time for another daytime session at the Record Plant.

I had forgotten to eat dinner, and by 12:45 a.m., when Richardson sent Michael Bruce and me into the big room to record backgrounds on "Woman Machine," I was tired and hungry and weary of the ceaseless playbacks on the control room's speaker system. But as soon as we put our headsets on, the excitement returned. More people from the Cooper office staff, and from adjoining studios, had come into the control room. The couch and chairs and stools were filled, and most of the standing room was occupied, too. In the afternoon, when we had sung the "Hard Hearted Alice" parts, the control room had been empty, save for Richardson and Douglas and a few working technicians. There had been

no sense of having an audience. During the rest of the afternoon and evening, while other backgrounds were being recorded, I had convinced myself that it was foolish to be nervous. After all, mistakes came through the control room speakers all the time, these people were used to hearing them. Just relax and let it be fun. But now, with a control room full of spectators, I couldn't think about being relaxed, or being hungry, or anything but the fact that, in another few minutes, I would have to sing in front of a crowd.

We waited for instructions from Richardson. Mike Bruce was sitting on a stool in front of the microphone, reading through a teen magazine called *Spec*, which featured a cover line that asked the question, "What would happen if you took Alice home with you?" Alice came into the room, carrying his copy of the financial statement. "I just want you two Carusos to know that I'm giving up the late show to watch you sing," he said. He held up the financial statement. "Did you read this yet, Mike?" he said. "What's this item under spring tour expenses: four hundred dollars, penicillin for Neal?" Then he went back to sit on the couch in the control room and watch.

"Listen to it through once," Jack Richardson's voice said in my headset. "You two sing the same part four times. It ends in a pretty high falsetto, again, so Bob, you might let Mike take the last phrase himself. Roll tape."

Our part was to be recorded, as in "Hard Hearted Alice," over a solo voice that Alice had already done earlier in the week. The lines were:

Oh, woman machine,
Oh, woman macheee-heeen,
Oh, woman machine.
Oh, woman machee-heeeeeeeeeen...

The chorus appeared four separate times during the song. As we waited for a signal from Richardson, Bruce warmed up. He sang the chorus repeatedly, without an instrumental background. He turned to me and started nodding his head, urging me to practice along with him. He was wearing a stage smile. He kept nodding and singing, but I was preoccupied with the people in the other room, and I neglected to join in. Finally, I got the point, and we started singing together. Without music behind us, we sounded like midnight alley howlers. “Don’t worry about them,” Bruce said. “Just watch me, so we can get our words together.” We worked for about five minutes. Richardson let us practice without the tape until, hearing us in the control room, he thought we were ready to record.

Alice stuck his head in the door. “Come back tomorrow and we’ll take the thorns out of your paws,” he said.

The instrumentals began. I kept staring through the glass, at all the people staring back. Someone touched my arm. It was Mike Bruce. He was signaling for me to look at him, and forget the audience. He was nodding and smiling again, keeping beat with the song. Half a beat before we were to come in, he raised his eyebrows, as a cue to take a breath and start.

As had been the case on “Hard Hearted Alice,” the instrumentals were too loud for me to hear my own voice. I looked at Bruce. He apparently was having the same trouble, and he had shoved his thumbs up under his headset, and into his ears. So did I, and it worked; my thumbs shut out just enough of the music to allow me to hear myself, but let in enough so that I could hear Alice’s taped voice and sing along with it. Bruce was going out of his way to give me a hand. He was making sure that he carefully pronounced each word of the chorus, exaggerating his mouth

movements, so that I could match him and not be tempted to rush my words, or to hesitate and drag them.

When we had completed it the first time, Richardson said, “That’s not bad. Be sure you don’t drop the last part of the last word in each line. Make sure you draw out the second syllable in ‘machine’ every time. I’d rather have you overdo it than cut it short. Make it ‘Oh, woman macheeeeeeen, oh, woman machee-heeeeeeeeeen.’ Watch each other so you end up at the same place. Either of you have any questions?”

We didn’t.

“Listen, Bob,” Richardson said. “As long as we’re stopped for a minute, why don’t you sing me the chorus by yourself, without Mike? I want to hear you.”

“Without any instrumentals?” I said.

“Right,” Richardson said. “I want to hear how you’re singing the words.”

I glanced into the control room again. No one had left; they were all looking back through the glass.

“Any time,” Richardson said.

I took a breath. I closed my eyes. “Oh, woman machine, oh, woman machee-heeeeen…” My voice came through the headset. Without the instrumentals, and without Mike Bruce’s voice beside mine, it was naked and quavering. “Are you sure I have to do this?” I said.

“Do it again,” Richardson said. “It’s fine.” No one seemed to be laughing in the control room, but then, it was dark in there, they would have had to be leaping up and down and slapping their thighs for me to notice.

Bruce pulled his headset off, and he motioned for me to do the same. He led me over to a corner of the studio, away from the microphone.

“Don’t sweat,” he said. “Listen, you should have heard us on our first albums. Don’t think about the people in there. They’ve all been around this stuff for years, and they know how it is. Just listen to Alice’s voice on the tape, and watch me, and it’ll be fine.”

We went back to the microphone and put on the headsets. The song started, and again it began to be fun. Real fun this time; it was late, and I had been at the studio for twelve hours without food, so I was groggy and a little drunk, and it was a kick. Bruce and I began to stomp our legs on the carpet to keep time, and to lean in toward the microphone only at the last second, and I stopped worrying about whether or not I sounded foolish, and concentrated on having a good time. I looked into the control room once while we were singing, and Alice was pounding his fist on the couch to keep time with us. A girl who had come in from watching another session was dancing by herself, near the door to the control room, where there was some light, and I could see that she was singing along with Mike and me. I began to hope that Richardson would keep finding fault, so we could do this all night.

But before long, his voice came over the headset. “Okay,” he said. “Nice work. Come in and hear it, and then everyone can go home.”

We listened to the playback, and I’ll be damned if it didn’t sound like a rock and roll record. I tried to catch Richardson’s eye, to see if he would say anything about wanting to produce my *Mr. Rock and Roll* album, but he was marking up his chart. When he did look up, it was only to say, “Goodnight, everyone.”

“Let’s get a cab,” Alice said. “Let me call Cindy first so she can let me in.”

He told Cindy that he would be right home, and that he didn’t have his keys again. He listened for a moment, then put the phone down and said to me, “Cindy wants to know how you like being a popstar now.”

I said that it was fine, just fine, and that I fully expected to be gang-raped by whatever women were hanging around the Park Lane lobby when I returned tonight.

Alice passed that along to Cindy, then turned to me and said, “She says you’re her favorite popstar, and she volunteers to be the first.”

This time, I was the one who spilled the whisky on the cab ride back.

SIX

There were eight weeks between the completion of the album and the beginning of the Holiday Tour. I returned to Chicago, and to my newspaper job. I left New York on the morning after I had recorded the “Woman Machine” vocals with Mike Bruce; two days after I arrived back in Chicago, the newspaper *Chicago Today* ran a Page One picture of Alice Cooper and Liza Minnelli singing at the Record Plant. The caption duly noted that the two were readying a new Cooper album called *Muscle of Love*.

On two occasions while I was home, I ran into spontaneous signs that the carefully built Cooper-as-vile-pervert image was still holding up. One came at a television studio, where I was participating on a talk show in conjunction with my job. When, in introducing me, the host of the program mentioned that I would be traveling as a performer with the Alice Cooper band to do research for a book, the studio audience —mostly women in their forties and fifties who had chartered a bus to come in from a distant suburb to watch the show—booed so loudly that the host had to ask them to stop. The other incident came at a meeting of a Chicago women’s civic group, where I had been invited to speak on a panel. As soon as the moderator mentioned the Cooper project, several of the women in the audience gathered up their coats and walked out. After the panel discussion ended, a number of women followed me all the way to the parking lot, asking me how “such a nice young man” as myself could endorse the downfall of every decent American value by associating, however briefly, with Alice Cooper. One of the women said that she had spent the last six months trying to break her fourteen-year-old son of his fanaticism for the Cooper band, and did I think I was helping her any by taking part in this sickness?

The reactions from teenagers were somewhat different. On the day after the television host mentioned I would be traveling on the Cooper tour, my telephone at the *Sun-Times* rang all morning and afternoon, and there were calls every day after that until I left Chicago again for the tour. The callers were all young, and most of them wanted to go on the tour, to be allowed backstage, to know what hotels the band was staying in, to be sent pieces of the baby doll after it had been hacked. There were letters, too. An excerpt from a typical one written by a sixteen-year-old girl:

Please don't throw this away without reading it! My friend told me that she heard on TV you were going to travel with Alice Cooper. Please, please, write me and tell me if the show will be appearing anywhere near Chicago, or in the Midwest. I will do anything to see it. Last time Alice was in Chicago at the Amphitheatre, I got tickets, but my father wouldn't let me go. I will go anywhere to see the show. If you could let me meet Alice, I would love you forever. Please tell me where you will be on the tour, and please let me come. I won't be any trouble. My parents say Alice is insane and immoral, but I think he is the sexiest boy in the world. Please tell Alice that I love him to death...

Meanwhile, *Muscle of Love* had gone on sale, and the final logistical arrangements for the tour were being completed. In the first week of December I went to New York for rehearsals. After I had checked in at my hotel, I called the Alive Enterprises offices to talk to Shep Gordon, and because he was on another line, I was put on hold. Instead of silence on the line, however, there was music; the Cooper people had hooked up a machine that played albums while a caller waited for his party to come onto the phone. The song that played while I waited was "Woman Machine," and I found myself humming along with my own voice.

Shep said to come on down. The offices occupied the penthouse floor of a building at 80 Fifth Avenue. There was a reception area, and then a long hallway with small offices for the Cooper staff and clerical workers.

When I entered Gordon's large office, he was on the telephone. "Warner Brothers fucked it up," he was saying to someone. "We are out of product in Detroit. That's inexcusable. They said they shipped yesterday, and I told them the album sold out in forty-five minutes yesterday. All that promotion in Detroit, and you can't buy the album because it's not in stock."

Gail Rodgers, Gordon's secretary, was at her desk outside his office, trying to say "no" in the most tactful way possible. Her first job in the music business had been selling candy behind the counter at the old Fillmore East. Today she was talking on the telephone to a reporter from *Paris Match*, saying that yes, she understood how big a layout the magazine was planning on Alice, yes, she understood that a cover was a possibility, but no, it simply could not be arranged, there was no chance that Alice would be able to jog and ice skate in Central Park for the benefit of the photographer. Alice had to rehearse, and then there was only a two-day break until the beginning of the tour in Nashville, and no, she could not ask Alice to think about anything but the tour. Even for a cover.

Across the hall from Gail Rodgers's desk, Mike Roswell was in his office. He, too, was on the phone. Roswell was Gordon's chief assistant, and director of promotion for the band. He had a list spread out on the desk in front of him; it contained the call letters and telephone numbers of the rock and roll radio stations in every city on the tour. Roswell was calling the music directors of each of the stations, telling them that Alice was available for telephone interviews prior to the

show dates, and reminding them that “Teenage Lament ’74” was the song that had been released as a 45 rpm single from the *Muscle of Love* album. “Yeah, that’s cool, Alice will call and ask for you,” Roswell said into the telephone. “See you when we get to town. Remember, ‘Teenage Lament ’74.’”

Across the way, back in his office, Gordon had taken another call, this one from a promoter who was handling one of the tour concerts. “No, we really don’t work that way,” Gordon said, in that soft, deceptively non-aggressive voice. “We would rather say fifty dollars and make fifty than say a million dollars and make nine hundred thousand. That’s not the way we operate. I don’t like to hear you say ‘we might not make it.’ I can’t look Alice in the face and say ‘we didn’t get paid.’ If we decide to go ahead and do something, then we do it right.”

Down by the reception area, David Libert was talking to two secretaries, who were taking notes. Libert was the road manager for the Alice Cooper band, and it would be his job to physically run the tour. Libert would be responsible for getting the band, the technicians, the equipment men, and the management personnel from city to city, from airport to hotel, from hotel to arena. Libert would be responsible for checking the box offices at each performance, for making sure the promoter was not cheating the group out of money, for carrying the cash and paying the hotel bills and making sure that everyone was out of bed in time for the airplane flights. There was a radio playing in Libert’s office, and a newscast was on the air. Jerry Rubin, the ’60s radical, was angrily talking about a federal appeals court decision that had upheld a number of contempt charges stemming from the 1969-70 Chicago Conspiracy Trial. “America will be outraged by this decision,” Rubin’s voice said, but neither Libert nor the two secretaries paid any attention. They were busy planning their own manner of outraging America, and

it was time to get the details firmed up. “All right, Dolin and Mashbir will ride on the buses,” Libert said, and the two secretaries made appropriate notes. Libert was working his way through a list of everyone who would be on the tour. At each airport, there would be two chauffeur-driven Cadillac limousines, one chartered bus, and two or three rented station wagons. Libert was determining now who would be transported from the airports to the hotels by each of the various vehicles. He wanted to get that decision out of the way now, before the tour started, so that there would be no confusion or arguments on the road over who got to ride in the Cadillacs, and who had to ride in the buses and station wagons. Tonight, at rehearsal, Libert would inform each person of his assignment, and would carry a written record with him on the road, just in case the question came up.

The tour would take place over the remainder of the month of December, and it would bring in slightly more than one million dollars. The band would be seen by more than two hundred thousand persons, who would pay up to $6.50 per ticket to watch Alice Cooper and an opening act. The tour party would travel on a full-sized Boeing 720 chartered jet, called “Starship One” and converted into a flying luxury townhouse. For the comfort of flying on the Starship rather than on commercial airplanes, the group would pay thirty-five thousand dollars to Ward Sylvester, the Starship’s owner.

Opening night was four days away, in Nashville, Tennessee. After tonight’s rehearsal, the massive stage would be loaded into two forty-eight-foot semi-trailer trucks, and the tour’s two Teamster drivers would head south in the darkness. One of the secretaries said, “The drivers need some pocket money to get down to Tennessee.” Libert said, “Remind me at rehearsal tonight. I’ll give them five hundred apiece.” On the radio, the disk jockey said that Alice Cooper had a big

new single, and the opening chords of “Teenage Lament ’74” came into Libert’s office. Libert and the secretaries neither smiled nor looked up in recognition. “Randi may have to ride on the buses, I’ll decide about that later,” Libert said.

I went to the Fillmore East at seven p.m. The Fillmore, Bill Graham’s famous rock and roll palace, had been shut down for several years, and no longer was the site for New York concerts. Shep Gordon had rented it for rehearsals this week, though, and so once more the sound of cranked-up electric guitars floated out over the intersection of Second Avenue and Sixth Street. Tonight, someone had placed a dozen fresh lilies by the front door of the Fillmore. But the front door was locked, the band had been told to enter through a side stage exit on Sixth Street, and so the performers did not see the flowers.

I walked past the two huge Cooper trucks, and pushed open the stage door. There, on the Fillmore stage, was the flashing, glittering, towering Cooper show setting. Twelve of the tour’s equipment men, electricians, sound engineers, and carpenters were swarming over it, hooking up cables, adjusting lights, plugging in amplifiers, nailing together sections of the stage floor. The hanging bodies and mirrored balls were fastened in place, just as I had last seen them in Indianapolis.

The seats in the auditorium were empty, save for a handful of people with the Cooper party. Alice and Mike Bruce were sitting five rows back, and they motioned for me to join them.

“Been getting a lot of studio work since your debut?” Mike said.

I said hello, and said that I hadn’t expected to see them until Nashville, but that Shep had asked me to come to New York

for the rehearsal. Back at the Alive Enterprises offices, I had been told that the band would be going through the complete show twice this evening.

“I don’t know if I have the strength to do it twice,” Alice said. “I had premarital intercourse last night.”

“I hope you brought along a lot of pain killer for the tour,” Mike said to me.

I looked at him. I didn’t know what he meant.

“Shep told you about your part, didn’t he?” Alice said.

“No,” I said. “We didn’t get a chance to talk at the office. I guess he’s going to tell me right before the rehearsal starts.”

“Oh, God,” Alice said. “You don’t know about it, then?”

No, I said, and I was getting a little concerned. Here it was, less than a week before the tour was due to hit the road, and I hadn’t been told if I was even in the show. There had been moments when I had thought that Shep might have forgotten about it; I had brief visions of showing up in New York only to find that his agreement to put me in the act had slipped his mind.

“Oh, he didn’t forget,” Alice said. “You’re going to be the climax of the show every night, if you live through the tour.”

Just then, Shep appeared. He came down the aisle until he was next to Alice, Mike, and me.

“Did they tell you?” Shep said.

“We were just going to,” Alice said.

“Well, no use holding the suspense any longer,” Shep said. “Do you remember that Lone Ranger idea that Alice used to

talk about?”

I had to think for a few moments. I recalled a time, when I had first met Alice and the band, and Alice had said, “I’ve got a great idea for a way to end the show. We’d hire the Lone Ranger and Tonto, the real ones. Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels. We’d have them come on stage, right after all the sickness, and the Lone Ranger would say, ‘This must be stopped! These people cannot do this to our country! This evil must be wiped out!’ And then we’d attack him. We’d beat the hell out of the Lone Ranger. Knock him apart. And then we’d rip his mask off in front of all those kids.”

“What,” I said. “You want me to play the Lone Ranger every night?”

“No,” Shep said. “But close.”

“Well then, who?” I said.

“What season is it?” Alice said.

“Christmas,” I said.

“And what are we calling the tour?” Shep said.

“The Holiday Tour,” I said.

“So who does it make sense for the band to beat up every night?” Shep said.

“I don’t know,” I said. “Who?”

“Think,” Shep said.

I thought. “Not Santa Claus,” I said.

“Santa Claus,” Shep said.

“You’re going to beat up Santa Claus?” I said.

“Not just beat you up,” Mike Bruce said. “It’s going to look like we kill you. Can you imagine a better way to end the show than killing Santa Claus?”

“We’ve already bought a suit for you,” Shep said. “It’ll go like this: You know that Kate Smith ‘God Bless America’ bit at the end of the show? Well, we’re cutting that out. And we’re not using that big totem with the laser eyes behind the set. We’re using a giant Christmas tree instead, for the holiday feel. So at the end of the show, on cue, the five members of the band will come on stage from one side. We’ll play Christmas carols on the loudspeaker system in the arenas. And at the same time, you’ll be coming in from the other side. I want you waving to the crowd, ‘Ho-Ho-Ho’ing, waving the V-sign, patting your stomach—the whole routine. Play it straight. While you’re drawing the attention of the audience, the band will walk up onto the riser at center stage. The spotlight will follow you across the front of the stage, until you get to the riser too. You’ll climb the stairs to the riser, and pretend that you’ve just noticed the band is there. You can wave hello to them or something, and then turn back to the audience, and keep smiling and acting happy. That’s when the band will surround you. Alice will throw a punch at you, and then knock you backwards. We’ll work on it tonight, so you don’t get hurt. If you know what’s coming, it can look real and still not do any damage. You’ll go down on the stage floor, and pretend to be unconscious. The band will stomp you. We’ll work that out, too, so the kicks don’t land very hard. But we’ve got to make it look like you’re really getting the shit kicked out of you, otherwise the whole effect is wasted. After you’ve been beaten up enough, the band will pick you up and carry your limp body off stage. As soon as you get out of the view of the audience, all of you will run like hell for the dressing room. That’s the

end of the show, and the audience will be trying to get to you."

"You'll learn to love it," Alice said.

"We're going to run through the whole show twice tonight," Shep said. "I don't think you'll have any questions about it, after you do it a couple of times. It's the only really new thing in the show, so we'll break it down on stage the first time so everyone knows what's going on."

"Here's Neal and Dennis," Alice said. "Now if Glen just shows up, we can get started."

Neal Smith and Dennis Dunaway were approaching us. Neal, the drummer in the Alice Cooper group, was the picture of rock and roll flamboyance. He was six foot three, and he liked to wear boots with five-inch heels to make him stand out even more in a crowd. His long blond hair hung down to the small of his back, and he favored plaid suits and long earrings and silver-and-turquoise jewelry. Under all that hair, he had the sullen, slack-jawed face of a rural gas station attendant, but he had taken to the life of a famous rocker with great ease. The first thing he had done with his rock and roll money was to buy a new Rolls-Royce. Neal Smith loved to draw attention to himself in public, to be pointed out as a rock and roll star, and tour life was perfect for him. The rest of the year, people might see him and merely assume that he was odd looking. On the road, though, day after day, in cities and towns all over the world, the locals would know that the Alice Cooper band was in for the night, and that this towering blond twenty-six-year-old getting out of the black limousine just had to be a performer. For Neal, the attention and the deference were a dream fulfilled.

Dennis Dunaway, the group's bass player, was different. Thin, pale, quiet, delicate-featured, he was unhappy around

people who gaped at rock and roll celebrities. Unlike the rest of the band, he seldom called the road manager on tour with requests for limousines or liquor or special services. Before and after the show, he could be found in his hotel room, talking or watching television or listening to tape cassettes with his girlfriend, Cindy Smith, Neal's younger sister. Dennis and Cindy had lived together for years; except for the airplane and limousine rides, and the actual performances, they seldom saw the rest of the tour party. Cindy played the part of the dancing tooth in the stage show, and she designed the band's costumes. She and Dennis ate all their meals together on the road, and were just as happy on a dull night as on a crazy one. When Dennis had received his first big Alice Cooper check, he had gone to the dentist and had corrective braces put on his teeth, something he had needed since childhood. He wore them now, as he arrived at the Fillmore Fast for rehearsal.

"Hello, Bob," Dennis said. "I hear you're going to be in the show. Welcome."

"Santa!" Neal Smith said. "I always wanted to beat the fuck out of somebody on stage. You better get some good padding, man. I tend to get carried away when I'm up there."

Shep Gordon looked around the auditorium. "Anybody seen Glen?" he said. "If we're going to get out of here at any normal hour, we're going to have to get started."

"Fuck Glen," Neal Smith said. "Let's just start without him. It doesn't matter, anyway. We'll probably sound better."

Glen Buxton was the fifth member of the Alice Cooper band. In the early days, he had been the best musician of them all, the lead guitar player. Success had devastated him. He had become such a serious alcoholic that his pancreas had

swelled to several times its normal size, and he had almost died. Now, under doctor's orders, he could not drink at all. The other Cooper members reported that he had turned to other, more expensive, nonalcoholic habits. Over the years he had lost virtually any semblance of self-discipline. On the road, the others hated the thought of dealing with him. He would not get out of bed in the morning. He would have to be physically pulled from his hotel room in order to make it to the shows. His guitar playing had become so sloppy, so lackadaisical, that he had been the main reason why two non-Alice Cooper musicians were added to the stage show. There were rumors that Glen Buxton had not even recorded on the last three Cooper albums; rumors that on certain nights, when his stage performance was particularly out of hand, the Cooper sound engineers had orders to turn his guitar off completely. But the young fans knew nothing of this. To them, he was one of the five happily twisted members of Alice Cooper. At a point in their career where the degree of showmanship and professionalism was financially vital to the members of the band, Buxton's deteriorating ability to function as a conscious, alert adult was a problem for all of them. At twenty-six, underneath his rock and roll hair and jewelry, he had the lined, troubled face of a sorrowful old man.

That was the Alice Cooper group: Alice, the skinny, mascaraed, determinedly perverted international superstar; Mike Bruce, the ambitious, businesslike guitar player; Neal Smith, the outlandish-looking, stardom-loving drummer; Dennis Dunaway, the polite, silent bassist; Glen Buxton, the alienated, retrogressing, solitary guitarist. They had grown up together in Arizona. In high school, as a joke for a lettermen's show, they had first gone onstage as a Beatle-parodying band. That was in 1964. In the years since, they had called themselves the Earwigs, the Spiders, the Nazz, and finally, Alice Cooper. In 1968, in Los Angeles, they had

met Shep Gordon and his partner, Joe Greenberg. They had signed a management contract with Gordon and Greenberg, and had decided to use the gimmick of blurred sexuality and theatrical violence and outrage in their attempt to become famous. They had made the decision at the right time. Now, with the tour about to begin, they were preparing once again for the one portion of the rock and roller's life that could convince them, day after day, that they really had achieved what they had set out to do. In the recording studio, or in the business offices, or in their handsome homes in Greenwich, Connecticut, it was easy for them to stop once in a while and wonder if it was not all just a frigid, bloodless, strangely vacuum-like business, measured only on accountants' ledgers. During those times, it was possible for the members of the band never even to see each other, never to sing or perform or go out of their houses, if they did not feel like it. But their fame would grow anyway. The records would sell, and the publicity people would plant the column items and magazine stories, and the Alice Cooper band would make more and more money. The five of them, sitting in their own bedrooms, would turn on the television, and see Johnny Carson drop the name of their band to get a guaranteed laugh and they would wonder if this was what success really felt like.

But the road—the road was different. The road was the real thing. On the road, they could see and taste what it meant to be rock and roll stars. The hundreds of thousands of people buying tickets to see them, and the screaming voices and frantic rushes for the stage in the country's biggest arenas, and the girls waiting in the hotel lobbies for them, the television crews wanting interviews, the newspaper reporters calling on the telephone, the limousine drivers waiting up all night in case any of them felt like going out at four a.m., the twenty-four-hour-a-day contact with one another and with their traveling support entourage, the road

manager babying them from city to city, the eighty minutes on stage each night when they could legitimately feel as if they were the center of the entire universe—that was tour life, that was something they could reach out and touch, that is what they would remember some day, when it was all over and they were thinking back and trying to grasp a memory of what it had been, in the 1970s, when they were genuine stars. The road would be what they remembered.

“Glen’s on his way,” Shep Gordon said. “Let’s get started, he should be here any minute.”

We walked up a small flight of stairs, onto the stage. The band members were all in street clothes, and they looked drab and out of place as they took their positions on the glittery set. “The only people allowed on stage during the show are the performers and the stage crew,” Shep said to me. “There are ten of you who are performing. There’s the band, which is five; then there are Mick Mashbir and Bob Dolin, the extra guitarist and keyboard man, who make seven; there’s you, that’s eight; there’s the Amazing Randi, the magician who plays the dentist and the executioner, that’s nine; and there’s Cindy Smith, the dancing tooth, which makes ten. You can be anywhere on the stage you want during the show, but try not to be too visible until your part comes on. Kneel behind an amplifier when you can. It looks bad to have people walking around on stage during the performance. If you should decide to wander around in the audience during the show, that’s okay, but always be back on stage in plenty of time for your Santa bit. If any of the local security guards should try to keep you off the stage, get the attention of one of our stage crew. They’ll know you. The worst thing that could happen is for the band to come on at the end waiting for you, and for you not to be there. You’ve got to be responsible for yourself, and make sure that never happens.”

I walked behind the stage set, and Shep introduced me to Larry Hitchcock, a relaxed, smiling twenty-five-year-old with a pony tail and a Buffalo Bill mustache. Hitchcock had the enormously detailed job of stage manager for the tour; it was his responsibility to get the mammoth set built every morning, tom down every night, and to the next town overnight in time to be rebuilt again the next morning. “I’ve been wondering where you were,” Hitchcock said. “I wanted to show you the stage dressing room.”

He led me to a small booth that had been constructed directly underneath the spot on the stage where Neal Smith’s drum set rested. The area was only a few feet square, and was surrounded by black cloth curtains. “This is where you’ll change,” Hitchcock said. “There are a number of costume changes during the show, and there’s no time to do it in the big arena dressing room off stage, so we had to build this. At the beginning of the show, all of the costumes will be hanging in here. When you hear your cue... do we know what his cue is, Shep?”

“‘School’s Out,’” Shep said.

“...when you hear ‘School’s Out’ begin, you come in here and put the Santa Claus suit on,” Hitchcock said. “It’ll be here, that’s our job, don’t worry. After the show every night, give it back to someone in the stage crew, and it’ll be here again in the next town the next night.”

Hitchcock clapped his hands several times. “Gentlemen?” he called.

About a dozen young men appeared immediately. They were the members of Hitchcock’s crew.

“This is Bob Greene,” Hitchcock said. “He’ll be on stage every night. You know that Santa Claus routine we’ve been talking about? Well, he’s going to do it.”

“Father Christmas!” said Andy Mills, a young Englishman who had come to the Cooper band as an equipment man after working for Rod Stewart and the Faces.

“Jesus,” said Goose Graham, a twenty-year-old who was responsible for making sure Neal’s drum kit was set up intact every night. “You’re going to get killed. What would anyone want to do that for?”

“He’s a writer,” Hitchcock said. “But as far as we’re concerned, for the duration of the tour he’s a member of the band. None of the rules about keeping reporters away from the stage apply. After the tour is over, he’s probably going to write about what is was like. For now, though, just remember that he’s going to be on the stage every night.”

“Beatin’ up Father Christmas,” Andy Mills said. “What’s wrong with that Cooper?”

Glen Buxton walked past us. He had just come in the stage door. He was smoking a cigarette and carrying his guitar case.

Without a word to Shep or Hitchcock or anyone else, he rounded the back corner of the set, walked to his position on the left side of the set, and plugged in his guitar.

“Okay,” Shep said. “Let’s go through it.”

The instrumentalists hit the first chords of “Hello! Hooray!” and Alice, beer in hand, walked toward the front of the stage. In Nashville, he would be in full costume and makeup; here, he was not. Alice did none of the demented crouching and facial twitching that he would be using in a few nights.

This was strictly a perfunctory walkthrough of the show, to make sure that everyone remembered how it went. The routine was exactly the same as the Billion Dollar Babies tour had been the previous spring; it was precisely the same show, with two exceptions: the substitution of a few songs from *Muscle of Love* in place of several older numbers, and the addition of the Santa Claus act. The rehearsal was mainly for the benefit of the instrumentalists, in order for them to get used to playing on stage together again. This was the song that had opened the show in Indianapolis, where I had been so amazed to see Alice lurching madly through the smoke; now he looked as if he was casually walking to the drugstore for a newspaper.

I sat on a metal table at stage left. It was the prop used in the tooth-drilling scene, and it was stored directly behind a tall speaker box. It looked as if it might provide a comfortable place to watch the show throughout the tour, on stage and yet out of the immediate line of vision of the audience, and I made a mental note to use it every night.

The show was ragged. Most songs were stopped in mid-verse for the band members to discuss what they were doing wrong. Shep stood in the front row of the Fillmore's balcony, shouting instructions down during the breaks. I looked around the stage area, and saw cartons of brand-new baby dolls, each wrapped in polyethylene, ready to be ritually murdered all over America. The plaster of Paris body parts used in "I Love the Dead" were propped against a wall, drying; the equipment men had just given them a fresh coat of flesh-colored paint, so they would look realistic in Nashville. The Amazing Randi, the forty-four-year-old magician who acted as the dentist and executioner, was over in a corner, doing tricks with a handkerchief that turned into a cane, for an audience of three stagehands.

Midway through “I’m Eighteen,” Shep waved the instrumentalists to a halt. Their timing was off, and they weren’t playing together. Alice sat on the stage, and turned to Mike Bruce and said, “In order to get a sound out of the guitar, you have to pass your fingers over the strings.” Bruce paid no attention, and on a signal from Neal Smith, the band began the song again.

I looked out into the auditorium. Except for several people from the Cooper office, and a few rock scenesters who had heard about the rehearsal, the Fillmore was virtually empty as the show unfolded. It was hard to imagine that these same songs would be greeted with frenzied screams and stage-charges within a few days. Something else seemed off, other than the use of street clothes on the stage. I motioned to David Libert, the group’s slim, curly-haired road manager, who was watching the rehearsal from a few feet behind me.

“Is there something other than no costumes and no audience that makes this less dramatic?” I asked him.

“Definitely,” he said. “There’s no focus for the excitement, because we aren’t using spotlights tonight. On the road, Alice will have four Super Troupers trained on him every step he takes. He becomes the center of everyone’s attention automatically. We demand Super Troupers in the contract. They’re the best spotlights you can get. They have a maneuverability and strength that regular spotlights don’t have. Alice says that he can literally *feel* the difference on nights that there’s a screwup, and we have some other kind of spotlight. He says he can *feel* the intensity of a Super Trouper as soon as the spots hit him. You’ll see what I mean when we get on the road and you walk out for your part. All of a sudden, the whole arena is centered on you.”

I asked him if some promoters ignore the clause in the contract that demands Super Troupers.

“Yeah,” Libert said. “Some guys don’t want to go to the trouble of getting them, and figure we won’t notice it if they use regular spotlights.”

“What do you do in that case?” I asked.

“We fuck ’em at the box office,” Libert said.

The band was ready to go into “Unfinished Sweet,” the tooth sequence, but Alice motioned the instrumentalists to silence.

“Shep,” Alice shouted toward the balcony, “Cindy Smith isn’t here tonight. Are we going to run through the tooth anyway?”

“Someone put on the tooth,” Shep called down.

Andy Mills, the English equipment man, slipped the huge tooth over his head, and came dancing out.

“Sorry,” Alice said in a Groucho Marx voice to the ten or twelve people in the audience. “Our regular tooth isn’t here tonight.”

Halfway through the song, Shep Gordon began screaming from his spot in the balcony: “Where’s the toothbrush? The giant toothbrush isn’t there! Who’s responsible for that? And we didn’t get the fog! We need the fog!”

Another equipment man dragged the toothbrush to center stage, and the smoke machine belched into action. On “Sick Things,” Alice walked over to Andy Mills, who was removing the boa constrictor from the small suitcase where it was carried.

“I hope someone’s been playing with the snake to keep it gentle,” Alice said. He gingerly took it from Mills, draped it over his shoulders, and did a brief walk-on with it before returning it to its suitcase. “It’s a little nervous, Andy,” Alice said. “Will you make sure it’s been fed before the show in Nashville?”

Again on “Dead Babies,” the instrumentalists were out of time with one another, and they stopped in mid-song. “Hey, Neal,” Mike Bruce called up to Smith. “I have a tape from the last tour, in Vancouver, and you make the same mistake. You come in too early. It’s supposed to be ‘Dead’... and then you hit the drum. You’re coming in too early.”

“Fuck it, I have the same tape,” Neal yelled down. “I know when I’m supposed to come in. You were late, that’s all.”

Dennis Dunaway, sensing impending unpleasantness, walked up to a live microphone and said, “Hey, kids! Mrs. Vincent down the block needs an operation! Let’s do a benefit!”

“Let’s do a show!” Alice said into his hand mike.

They went back to “Dead Babies,” and Alice walked through his part, carrying a baby doll but not even bothering to pick up the hatchet. When it was time for the guillotine scene on “I Love the Dead,” the stagehands rolled out the big prop, and the Amazing Randi prepared to work the illusion.

“Never say Cooper lost his nerve,” Alice said, and then placed his head beneath the blade. Randi yanked a level, Alice fell safely away behind the machine, and the blade dropped. Randi pulled a fake, bloody Alice head from the bucket in front of the guillotine, and the show continued.

After the guillotine had been rolled back into its storage place, I asked Randi, a short, bald, white-bearded man, whether there was any danger that anything could go wrong, and that Alice could actually be killed.

“Never,” he said. “Oh, they tell people on the road that there’s just one hinge between Alice and beheading. That’s to make the kids in the audience look harder, to see if their night will be the night that Alice actually dies. But I built the machine. It’s completely failsafe. If one thing goes wrong, the other thing can’t happen. It’s a good illusion, and it does look like the head is lopped off, but it’s so safe that Alice could do it without even knowing how, and still make it work.”

Shep Gordon was walking onto the stage. “All right,” he said. “It’s time to do the Santa thing. Bob, go put the costume on. It’s in the dressing area. We have to make sure everything’s there. Everybody else, come here. I want to choreograph this exactly, so it looks right.”

I went into the black-curtained dressing area at the back of the stage. There was a metal folding chair in the tiny room, and a big clothing box. Inside was the Santa Claus suit.

I sat on the chair and put the red jacket over my shirt, and the baggy red pants over my jeans. There were a pair of black-plastic-and-white-fluff boot tops, and I had to take off my own boots in order to get them on, then fit my boots up into them. I tied the wide black belt around my waist. In the bottom of the costume box was a white cotton beard-and-mustache that fastened around the ears with an elastic band. I looked at it for a second, then slipped it on. Remaining in the box was a red flannel Santa hat, with a white cotton ball on the tip. I put that on, also. I felt ridiculous.

“Okay, Bob,” Shep called. “We’re ready.”

I did not want to leave the dressing room. The thought of marching across the stage, dressed in a Santa Claus suit, to be beaten up by five musicians and then dragged off, seemed so stupid and juvenile that I considered just taking the costume off and getting out of there.

Shep stuck his head in the dressing room. “Come on,” he said. “You’ve got to learn to get changed quickly. Pull your beard down a little more.”

I walked from the dressing room, and I cringed instinctively, in preparation for the razzing from the stagehands. But none of them took notice, except for Andy Mills, who said, “Yeah, Father Christmas all right.”

Behind the stage, the five members of the band were waiting. “I’m going to take Bob over and give him his cue,” Shep said. “Then we’ll walk through it once to block it out. I’ll cue you five by waving.”

Shep and I walked to the right side of the stage. As soon as we got there, the sound of Bing Crosby singing “White Christmas” filled the auditorium. Shep waved down to the other five, at the opposite end of the stage, and they ran out, and up the stairs to the raised platform at the center of the stage.

“Now at the same time, you’re walking,” Shep said. “This time we’ll just go out there and get it planned out. Then we’ll go through it again. Just remember, I want you waving and flashing the V-sign right up until the time you get slugged.”

We walked out to center stage, where Alice, Mike, Neal, Dennis, and Glen were waiting.

“All right, now, Bob will be coming across the stage while you five are making your way up here from the other side,” Shep said. “Let him act like he’s surprised to see you guys, and you act the same way. Don’t hit him right away, let the audience see you react to each other first.”

I was still mortified at being dressed up like this, and I looked at the band to see if anyone was snickering. They weren’t; they were all listening to Shep.

“Alice, you come around to the front, after Bob has turned back to the audience and started waving again,” Shep said. “At the same time, the rest of you get to the sides and in back of him. Alice, just smile at Bob for a couple of beats. Then throw a stage punch at him. When the punch is coming, Bob, look at least partially toward Alice. We want it to look like he hits you unexpectedly, but you have to see it coming in order for you to fall back and miss the force of the punch. After he hits you, just crumple to the ground and let them start kicking and mauling you. You guys are going to have to be careful and stop the weight of your kicks at the right spot. Do it for a while, but don’t let it get excessive. Then pick him up and carry him off, and that’s it.”

Neal Smith cut in. “He’s going to get hurt if he just has to fall backwards to the stage,” Neal said. “We ought to have somebody catch him before he hits.”

“I know,” Alice said. “Remember in junior high? When one guy would kneel behind someone, and another guy would knock the standing guy backwards? We can do that, but have someone else in back to catch Bob before he reaches the stage.”

“I’ll catch him,” Neal said. “Dennis, why don’t you kneel behind him every night?” Then, when he’s on the way down, I can cushion the fall.”

“That sounds good,” Shep said. “Let’s go through it once.”

I walked back to my starting point. The “White Christmas” tape was shut off. On a signal from Shep, the song was started again. Shep waved down to the others. They loped together toward the center of the stage. “Okay,” Shep said to me. “Now.”

I stepped out. Even with only a dozen people in the audience, I felt stupid all over again. I just wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible. I heard Bing Crosby singing all around me, and I tried to make myself disappear. I hunched my shoulders and looked down, and walked as quickly as possible to center stage.

“Stop,” Shep Gordon yelled. “Stop.” He walked over to the spot where the band and I were standing. “What happened to the playing to the audience, the waving and all that?” he said.

“Jesus, I don’t know,” I said. “I looked out there and saw those people watching, and I thought of myself in this suit, and I just wanted to get out of here as fast as I could.”

“Well, you’d better get over that now,” Shep said. “If you let ten or fifteen people do that to you, I don’t know. There are going to be nights when you perform in front of twenty thousand people.”

“It just seems so ludicrous,” I said.

Alice grabbed my arm. “It’s not ludicrous,” he said. “It’s show business. If you think your part is ludicrous, think how I feel coming out there with my face all painted up with mascara. Think how the others feel dragging my dead body all over the stage after I Love the Dead.’ This isn’t the way you normally make your living, but it is for us. So just get

used to the idea of being in show business for a while, and the fact that when you're on stage you're playing a part."

"The best thing to do is just say fuck it, and have a good time out there," Mike Bruce said to me. "Every person in that audience has paid a lot of money to come to the show, and every one of them would give anything to be allowed on stage. We all live for the time when we're on stage every night. If you let it, it can be a ball. So just relax and enjoy it."

"Let's try it again," Shep said.

They went back to their side of the stage, I went back to mine. The music stopped, started. They entered, stage left. I came out, waving and flashing peace signs to a non-existent audience. I worked my way slowly across the front of the stage. Then I walked up the steps to the raised portion. The five of them looked at me in surprise. I turned back to the empty seats again, waved again. Alice circled in front of me. "It's Santa!" he called to the rest of the band. I kept waving. Alice threw a punch at my stomach, then shoved me in the chest. I let myself fall backwards, over Dennis Dunaway's crouched body. As I toppled, Neal Smith caught me and lowered me to the floor of the stage, without being obvious about breaking the fall. After I was on the floor, they all gathered around me, kicking and stomping. None of it hurt, but they were all yelling like madmen and smacking their other feet against the hardwood floor, and it must have looked and sounded like they were beating me to death. After maybe a minute of this they picked me up and carried me lengthwise off the stage.

"Great!" Shep called. "Vicious!"

We returned to the stage together, where he was waiting.

"It looked good," Shep said.

“Except the music is terrible,” Mike Bruce said. “That song is too slow. We can get something other than ‘White Christmas,’ can’t we?”

“Yeah, we’ll get ‘Jingle Bells’ or something,” Shep said.

“I’ve got another idea, too,” Alice said. “You know how bad it got on the last tour, when I was throwing out the posters at the end of the show? There was almost a riot a couple of times. I really don’t want that to happen. So what if we got Bob a bag to carry on his way to the center of the stage? He could toss tee shirts and posters and stuff to the kids from the bag before he gets to us. That way I can cut the poster throwing out of my part, and they’re less likely to get us for inciting a riot if it’s Santa Claus instead of me doing the tossing. What do you think?”

“I think it’s a good idea,” Shep said. “We’ll have a bag made up by the time of the first show in Nashville.”

We went through the entire show once more. The Santa part worked without a hitch. If I was not yet exactly jubilant at the prospect of doing the act in front of hundreds of thousands of strangers all over North America, at least I was becoming resigned to being a Cooper-style trouper about it.

As we relaxed in the auditorium seats after the second rehearsal, a secretary from the Cooper office went up and down the aisles, giving copies of the tour itinerary to the performers and crew members. The itineraries were bound in clear plastic; the cover was a copy of the tour poster, featuring the artwork that was appearing in advertisements in all the cities we would pass through. On top, it said “The Alice Cooper Show—Billion Dollar Babies—Holiday Tour.” Underneath was a drawing of the band, in formal tails and

top hats, dancing in a conga line over a blood-splattered America, as gold coins flew all around them.

Inside was a list of all the cities that had thus far been scheduled for the tour, along with the auditoriums and names of the local promoters:

DECEMBER
8 Nashville—Municipal Auditorium (Sullivan & Magid)
9 Greensboro, N.C.—Coliseum (Lashinsky)
11 Madison—Dane County Expo Center (Bageris)
12 Ann Arbor—Univ. of Mich. Field House (Bageris)
14 Toronto—Maple Leaf Gardens (David Wollinsky)
15 Syracuse—Onondaga County War Memorial (Scher)
16 Norfolk—Scope (Klotzman)
19 Largo, Maryland—Capital Centre (Klotzman)
20 Tampa—Stadium (Lambusta)
26 New Haven—Coliseum (Finkel & Koplik)
27 Montreal—Forum (Donald K. Donald)
29 Binghamton—Broome County Coliseum (Klotzman)
31 Buffalo—Memorial Auditorium (Jerry Nathan)

Additional concerts were expected to be plugged into some of the open dates. Following the basic list of cities in the itinerary were individual breakdown sheets for each show. An example:

ALICE COOPER'S TIME SCHEDULE
Date of performance: December 12
Place: Field House, University of Michigan capacity 14,000
Location: S. State Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan
Telephone no. of hall: 313-769-1197
Hall manager: Athletic Board
Promoter: Bob Bageris, Bamboo Productions
Telephone no.: 313-559-7141
Promoter's address: 16300 W. Nine Mile Rd., Southfield, Mich. 48075

Show Hours: 8 p.m. Alice cooper showtime 9:30 p.m.
Doors open at 7 p.m. setup time 11 a.m.
Equipment driving from Madison, Wise. to Ann Arbor
Miles: 370
Hotel info: Holiday Inn Ann Arbor (West Bank)
2900 Jackson Rd. Joseph F. Barber, Inkpr. 313-665-4444 165 rooms all color TV

Group arrival time (approx.) 2:15 p.m.

Limousine info: Michigan Limo Service
Phone no: 313-368-1760
Bus info: DSR Charter Service (Miss Parker)
Phone no: 313-225-1550

Flight #: Starship One (45 minute flight)
Leaving: Madison at 12 noon CST, Dec. 12
Arriving: Ann Arbor (Detroit) at 1:45 p.m. EST
Ground Facility: Detroit, Butler Aviation
Phone no: 313-941-3000

There was a complete sheet for each city on the tour. And, lest the Cooper travelers become so caught up in all of this logistical minutiae that they be tempted to forget the reason they were making the trip—i.e., to spread their profitable on-stage outrage over another big chunk of North America—there were two additional sheets inserted in the back of the itineraries. If the daily timetables were an orderly part of the Cooper world that the young fans would never suspect of existing, these last two documents were graphic reminders of the public image that Alice Cooper had built up. The first was a copy of a memo from Paul Robbins, an executive of the Sheraton Corporation of America. The memo had been sent to Sheraton hotel and inn managers in cities where we would be appearing, and where the group had requested room reservations:

A couple of you have called concerning the Alice Cooper group which is due next month. Most of the reports make it seem like you've booked Attila the Hun—and those are the good reports!!

I have checked with Dave Libert, Cooper's road manager, who gave me a list of nearly 40 hotels and inns they've stayed at during the past year. I called four properties, including one where Cooper and Co. stayed twice, and got a unanimously good report card. No looting, pillaging or sacking. One place said there was "some kind of mistake with the travel agency and we were a little late in getting

paid, but no problem, really," while another said the group had spent $15,000 in rooms, food and beverages, room service, and assorted other items during a three-day stay.

I mention these reports for a couple of reasons—if there are any problems (which I don't anticipate), you've got an immediate problem and I've got my buffy in a sling for steering trouble your way. I know several of the people involved and none of them have two heads, bray at the moon or use thumbscrews for jewelry. This is not to say you've booked the Vienna Boys Choir and they're going to leave you independently wealthy. All I'm saying is that Cooper spends too much time on the road to lay waste to hotels and inns across the country; I can understand how these horror stories get started but I think we've also got to check into them a little deeper. My research shows four places where there wasn't trouble; if you're still apprehensive, I can give you other places to check on your own. If you've got other problems, yell.

The second document was somewhat different in nature. It had been given to Shep Gordon by United States postal inspectors, who were trying to trace its origin. It had been sent to a young boy in the Chicago area, whose mother had found it and called the authorities. The letter was typed, and full of misspellings; it was signed "Alice Cooper." Alice did not send the letter, of course; but a copy of it was included in the itinerary, without comment, as an example of what the Cooper image was, out there where we would be touring:

Dear Kevin,
I was happy to receive your letter. I am in fact holding your letter here while I am enthusiastically beating off. On this very envelope. So in a sense, you are holding on to my cum. Stickey huh? As for my next concert in Chicago, there isn't a date set as of yet, but I will write you back, since you show

much interest in me, and maybe I could stay with you when I cum to Chicago. Maybe I could even sleep in the same bed with you your very bed and you can suck on my twad! Does your mother have big tits? Try to get rid of your old man when I cum, so I can git at her good ol Clitoris without being botherd. Have to go now, you know a person has to reherse, and remember lick the envelope to get the real taste of my dick. Right back and in the mean time try to get a picture of your mother's body in the raw so I can get my hots. Thank you very much for being such a concerned and loyal fan of mine. If you like to blow make sure its slow the way I like it. See you at my next concert.

LOVE,
Alice Cooper

We all leafed through our copies of the itinerary. It was well after midnight. Gail Rodgers went from person to person, getting names and addresses for insurance and Customs purposes. Shep was talking to a sound man, asking why one of the amplifiers had kept losing power during the rehearsals.

"It's hard to explain in words. I could show you on a piece of paper," the sound man said.

Mike Roswell, Gordon's assistant, waited for Shep to finish with the amplifier problem. Then he said, "Alice is free from now until the Nashville show, except for an interview with *Rock Times* magazine at noon tomorrow."

Shep frowned. "Who did that?" he said.

"I don't know," Roswell said. "I guess it was okayed in the office."

"Why didn't anyone tell me?" Gordon said.

Roswell shrugged.

“They have a circulation of four,” Gordon said. “No, I don’t think so, I don’t think we’ll do it... I don’t know... I’ll think about it, but I don’t think we’ll do it.”

A few minutes later, Gordon walked up onto the stage and called, “Okay, everyone, that’s it until the first show. Rock and roll heaven coming up. Hope they have good penicillin in Nashville.”

The equipment men started to tear down the stage; as soon as they had finished, it would be loaded into the two long trucks. and the drive to Tennessee would begin. Alice and Mike Bruce and I departed from the stage door, and looked for a cab.

Mike, walking in front of us, held his arms out for us to stop. Forty feet ahead, at the corner of Second Avenue and Sixth Street, a sickening scene was taking place. Someone had gone into a nearby restaurant, and had left his little dog tied to a fire hydrant. The dog was yipping and barking, jumping around. Just at that moment, five Hell’s Angels were passing by the fire hydrant. One of them apparently was offended by the sound of the dog barking. He began to kick and stomp the dog, and his four companions joined in. They encircled the little animal, laughing and yelling as they smashed into it with their boots. People on the street walked quickly by.

''Stay right here,” Mike Bruce said.

Alice, the international symbol of violence and gore, stared at the bikers in horror. He was holding a six-pack of beer in his hand.

“For Christ’s sake, Alice, hide that beer behind your back before they see it,” Mike said. Alice quickly did.

When the Hell’s Angels had tired of their fun, they moved on down the block, leaving the dog crying on the sidewalk. We jumped into the first cab, and in minutes were out of the neighborhood. No one mentioned what we had just seen. We rode uptown in silence. It was time for the tour to begin.

SEVEN

I flew to Nashville a day early. The tour party would not begin traveling *en masse* until after the first concert; the Starship had been contracted to pick us up in Nashville on the morning after the show, and to carry us on to the second show in Greensboro, and to every date from that point on. We had been told that we could arrive in Tennessee at our own convenience, as long as it was no later than the afternoon of December 8, the day of the performance. So on the seventh, I checked into the Sheraton Inn in Nashville.

“A couple of the others got here last night,” the desk clerk said. ‘‘We’ve got you all on one floor. A lot of kids have been calling here asking about when you all are arriving, but we just tell them we don’t have any information.” The clerk had a master list of the Cooper travelers in front of him, and he penciled my room number in next to my name. After everyone had arrived, and all the rooms had been assigned, the room list would be Xeroxed and slipped under each of our doors.

The offices of the *Nashville Tennessean* were just down the block, and I decided to walk over and see what kind of advance buildup the show was getting. I went to the newspaper’s feature department, and met Jerry Bailey and Pat Thomas, two young writers who reviewed rock concerts on a regular basis. On Bailey’s desk was a cardboard stand-up picture of Alice flexing his bicep; it was the same photograph that Alice had told Bob Gruen to “send to *Playgirl*” when we had first seen it at the Record Plant, and now the Cooper publicity people had made sure that every rock writer in the country had one.

“Alice will sell out the Municipal Auditorium,” Bailey said. “We ran a picture of the band in our weekend feature section last week, which is the usual promotion we give a national

act. But Alice doesn’t need that, they can sell out just on the strength of the word they’re coming. Nashville is just another middle-sized town. It could just as well be in California, or in the north. It’s not a country music town. That’s just the stereotype. They can’t even book big country groups here. I’d say that Waylon Jennings couldn’t draw a thousand people in Nashville. The people who go to the Grand Ole Opry fly in here from Ohio and places like that. The kids here are just like the kids anywhere—they want rock, and Alice is about the hottest thing in rock right now.”

“There’s extra interest for Alice because he lost one of his old boa constrictors here a few years ago, and it turned up in the drainpipe of a motel,” Thomas said. “It was in all the papers, and it gives him additional local pull. Also, about forty-five kids got busted for dope during a Jethro Tull concert here recently, and that was big news. Police trouble doesn’t hurt attendance at the next big concert; it usually helps, as a matter of fact. I guess it makes a rock show even more the place to be. It’ll probably be the usual group, fourteen to twenty-five, maybe more young kids than usual. They know that Cooper is supposed to be weird, plus everyone’s heard that this is the first show of the Christmas tour, so it makes it sound kind of special.”

Bailey said, “I was down in our library getting some clips, and the kid who got them for me said he wouldn’t go to the show, because Alice kills animals on stage. So you still have that rumor alive.”

I went back to the hotel for dinner. In the dining room, our two truck drivers, Ron Kelley and Nick Brazell, were at a table for two. At another table were four of the tour equipment men—the young “roadies” who, with their hair and their jewelry and their rock and roll clothes, looked as much like performers as did Mike Bruce or Dennis Dunaway.

None of the band members had arrived in Nashville yet, but the hotel waitresses were sure that the roadies over in the corner were, in fact, the Alice Cooper band. One of the waitresses pointed at Ronnie Volz, one of the equipment men, and said, “That’s the one who paints his face up.”

After dinner I went across the street, to the Baptist Book Store. Behind the counter was a teenaged clerk with hair longer than any of the Beatles’ had been when they first arrived in America, longer than ninety percent of the current rock and roll stars. Three or four years earlier, in the *Easy Rider* days, he might have been scorned here. Now he was selling books by Billy Graham, and records by Tennessee Ernie Ford, as he swapped jokes with the store’s uniformed security policeman. I returned to my room, and listened to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio, and looked out the window at the dark, deserted, gothic Union Station across the way, with its connecting ramp to the downtown Post Office. The streets were empty. Tomorrow night, ten thousand of Nashville’s young people would turn out to see the Alice Cooper show; perhaps the young clerk at the Baptist Book Store would be among them. I switched on the hotel room television set. The program was “In Concert,” and the act was Cheech and Chong, the rock comics. They were doing a takeoff on Cooper-style rock. One of the comedians was announced as “Alice Bowie,” and he came onstage in a tutu and ballet slippers, along with a hairy chest, a beard, and a guitar. He sang a song called “I’m a Man.”

When I woke up the next day, there was noise in the hallway. I looked out the door. The band had arrived. Neal Smith was following a bellman to his room. “Hey, opening night,” Neal called to me. “There’s no business like show business,” he sang. He was wearing *Cool Hand Luke* silver sunglasses, and a yellowing tooth earring.

I got dressed and went down to David Libert's suite at the end of the corridor. Libert, the road manager, was thirty years old. In the mid-'60s, he had been a rock and roll singer himself. His group, The Happenings, had earned a gold record for "See You in September." Libert knew that the odds of staying near the top of the rock world for more than a few years were slim, and in 1971 he had signed on with Shep Gordon as road manager for the Cooper group. The job combined all the worst aspects of work as a certified public accountant, travel agent, baby sitter, Brink's guard, nightclub bouncer, social director, public relations man, delivery boy, and bank cashier. Libert was very good at it; he could work twenty-hour days on the road without losing his mind or his stomach, and be up at dawn the next day to answer the first phone call. That ability to keep functioning was the most important asset in a road manager's life. Libert had a thin, handsome Italian face under a head of curly black hair, and he looked somewhat like a debauched Frankie Avalon. He had adopted the low-key, persuasive Shep Gordon voice, but he could not pull it off quite as well, and a natural sense of excitability inevitably managed to creep into his conversations. As I walked into his room, he was sitting on a couch, stamping the date on a stack of white cloth backstage passes, which would be distributed before the show to tour personnel and local VIPs.

"Hi, the desk clerk told me you were already checked in," Libert said. He was wearing blue jean bib overalls and a denim jacket with a puppy's face and the words "Bitch Bitch Bitch" embroidered on the back. "Is your room okay? We had a couple of bad ones, and I can get you a change if you need it."

I told him the room was fine, and asked him how the tour logistics were going.

“Don’t ask,” he said. “There’s been a horrible fuckup. I just got here, and there was a message that the Allman Brothers are going to get rained out tonight in Tampa. It’s an outdoor gig, and now they say they’re going to be playing tomorrow night, instead. That means the Starship won’t be here tomorrow morning, because the Allmans will still have it. They can legally do it, they’re contracted for it through tomorrow, but they’d agreed to fly it to their home in Georgia late tonight, after their show, and let us have it tomorrow morning. Now we have no way to get to Greensboro tomorrow for the show. Tonight was supposed to be the last date of their tour. And five minutes ago I find out that they’re going to keep the plane until they can play the Tampa date tomorrow night, and we have no plane. I’m trying to work it out now.”

Rebecca Segal, Libert’s young assistant, was on the telephone. She was calling the Allman Brothers’ hotel in Tampa. “Mr. Phil Walden,” she said to the Tampa hotel operator.

“With the Allman Brothers,” Libert said to her.

“With the Allman Brothers,” Rebecca said into the telephone. “And operator? If he doesn’t answer in his room, will you come back? Or ring Willie Perkins if Phil Walden’s not registered.”

Thirty seconds passed. “Walden’s not registered,” Rebecca said to Libert.

“Tell the operator... here,” Libert said. He took the phone from Rebecca. “Operator, who else is in charge with the Allmans there? Operator? Is this the hotel operator? It’s the telephone company operator? Operator, hit your button, and the hotel operator will pick it up. Yes she will. Just hit your button.”

Ron Kelley, one of the Cooper truck drivers, came through the open door and into Libert's room. "I need some money to tip the bellmen for delivering the bags," Kelley said. Libert looked up from the telephone. He balanced the receiver between his head and left shoulder, reached into the bib of his overalls, and came out with a roll of about six thousand in cash. He peeled off a twenty, and gave it to Kelley.

"Operator?" Libert said. "Page Bunky Odom, then Willie Perkins, then Phil Walden. They're all with the Allman Brothers' management...Hello? Willie? Willie, this is David Libert, Alice Cooper's road manager? I have to find out what's happening. We're supposed to have the plane tomorrow... So it's raining there today?... So you're going to try to play again tomorrow night?... Yeah... Yeah... Have you talked to Ward Sylvester, the guy who leases the plane? You were supposed to play tonight, drop the band in Macon after the concert, and then come to Nashville. Now I've got no way to get our people from Nashville to Greensboro. No way... That's right. I have about twenty-five people, minimum." Libert slammed his hand down on a table, but his voice remained calm. "I want to find out how much it would cost to pick us up tomorrow morning, fly us to Greensboro, then fly back to Tampa to pick you guys up after your show. I have to find out how much it would cost, I'm kind of strapped for funds, and I don't know if it makes sense."

Dennis Dunaway, the bass player, came into the room. "Libert's not going to like this," he said to me. "The trucks we rented for the tour didn't have air-ride suspension, and the lights for the show got wrecked on the way down from New York. Now we have to get the fights fixed by tonight, and get two new trucks so it doesn't happen again."

Libert placed another phone call, this one to Ward Sylvester's office in Los Angeles: "Is Ward there? This is David Libert, with Alice Cooper. He knows about the problem? Okay, you try to get him. I'm hanging up. Tell him I'm waiting for his call."

Libert hung up. Within ten seconds, the phone rang. He picked it up:

"Hello?... Ward, I've been trying to get you... Okay, what's happening?... I've got to get your plane from Tampa to Nashville to Greensboro... There are no commercial flights that make sense for us... No, no, I can't do that... So what would it cost, roughly?... We're talking about three thousand dollars more than we were yesterday. Ward. So that would be six thousand dollars. Oh, God. Okay, I'm going to try to get hold of Bunky Odom. Yeah, he's with the Allmans, he's just a little below Phil Walden, a little above Willie Perkins... Keep in touch all afternoon, will you, Ward?" Libert hung up. Immediately, the telephone rang.

"Hello?" Libert said. It was Joe Sullivan, the local promoter for the Nashville concert. "Joe," Libert said. "I've got a problem. We need a plane. I'll give you backstage passes when we get to the arena."

Ron Kelley returned to the room. He said that twenty dollars was too much for a tip, because there had been only one bellman delivering the bags. Libert propped the phone on his shoulder again, took the twenty back from Kelley, handed him a ten-dollar bill.

"That's still too much for one guy," Kelley said.

"Give it to him," Libert said. "Who knows what we'll need him for by the time the night is through." Kelley left with the ten, and Libert returned to Joe Sullivan on the telephone:

“Joe, did you get the V.O. whisky? Is the bottle sealed?... Good... I’ll pick it up at the 4:15 sound check... And did you arrange for a platter of food at the hotel after the show?... Good. Put it in my room, 607.”

Shep Gordon arrived in the room, carrying his Vuitton briefcase. Libert stopped talking to Sullivan for a moment, and quickly ran down the airplane problem for Gordon.

“Okay, we’d better do something,” Gordon said. “Get off this call, and work on the plane.”

Libert told Sullivan he would see him at the Coliseum. He placed another call to the Allman Brothers’ hotel in Tampa. In a few minutes, someone came on the line.

“Bunky!” Libert said. “Dave Libert. We’ve got a problem. We need the plane. We have to get to Greensboro. I know, you’re contracted through tomorrow, it’s your plane. But let’s figure it out.”

Shep Gordon, seeing that Libert was doing all that could be done, left the room.

“Bunky?” Libert said. “There’s one of three solutions. One—We pay six thousand dollars. That’s what Ward Sylvester wants, and that way the charter picks us up tomorrow, flies us to Greensboro, goes back to Tampa for you, flies you home to Macon after your show, and picks us up in Greensboro again the next morning. Two—We get another charter, if we can find one. Three—We get the Starship, and you guys fly home to Macon commercially... I know, Bunky, but all week long I’ve been telling Shep, every day, we get it, we get it, we get it. Nothing was ever said about a rain date. Now I’m in a fucking bind. We cannot get a commercial flight... Bunky, I’ve never asked you a favor in my life, but

I’m in trouble. I’m unhappy. I’ll love you forever if you do this for me. Will you try? Thank you, Bunky.

Yeah, get back to me, I’ll be waiting.” Libert placed the receiver back in its cradle.

A local limousine driver came into the room. Libert had sent him out to buy a suitcase at a Nashville department store, because Glen Buxton, five minutes before leaving New York, had discovered he had broken his bag, and had to bring his clothes to Tennessee in a garment bag. “The only ones I could find cost twenty-eight dollars apiece,” the driver said. “I thought I should check before spending that much.”

“Buy two of them,” Libert said. “It’s three thirty. We have to leave for the sound check at four. Can you get the suitcases and be back by then?”

“I can try,” the limousine driver said.

“Okay, then go,” Libert said.

Libert went back to stamping the backstage passes. I asked him how serious the situation was, and whether the tour was going to be able to get started, with all the problems.

“Oh, sure,” he said. “This is nothing major, really. First day screw-ups. Well make it.”

I walked around the Municipal Auditorium with Shep Gordon. This was at the afternoon sound check—a runthrough of several songs, so that Artie King, the tour sound engineer, could sit at his console halfway back into the auditorium, and get the instruments balanced on the speaker system. Most days, the equipment men could take care of getting the instruments balanced, but for the first show, Shep wanted the band to do it themselves.

The auditorium was a modem ice hockey rink, with planks laid over the playing surface for the concert. Alice and the instrumentalists were on the stage, which was beginning to look like the finished version. The tour carpenters were raising the towers into place, and hanging the bodies from the top of the set. Outside, perhaps five hundred Nashville teenagers were sitting in front of the locked glass doors, three hours before the arena was scheduled to open, four hours before Stories, the opening act, would go on stage, five and a half hours before Alice would stagger out singing “Hello! Hooray!”

“The trucks worry me more than the airplane,” Shep said as he surveyed the seating layout. “Air-ride suspension is absolutely essential if we want to get our stage from city to city in any kind of usable condition. I don’t know how soon we can get new trucks. Ron Kelley told me that if we drive two more dates with the trucks we have now, we won’t have an unbroken piece of equipment left. Plus, I’m worrying about the Greensboro show tomorrow. The fuel shortage is hurting us there. To sell out the Coliseum in Greensboro, you have to sell twenty-five percent of your tickets in Charlotte. But now that you can’t buy gas on Sunday, we’ve only sold one half of one percent in Charlotte, because no one wants to risk driving over. It’s a hard sell. We may have empty seats.”

Larry Hitchcock came up, and motioned to his stage crew working at the front of the hall. “We’re doing the best we can with the broken stuff,” he said. “That’s a clear-cut breach of contract on the part of the trucking company. We specified air-ride, and they said we’d have it, and then they didn’t give it to us.” Gordon nodded.

Libert had arrived at the hall, and he, too, headed immediately for Gordon. “There may be a problem with

Stories tonight," Libert said. "Two of their roadies got busted in Ohio last night, for disorderly conduct or something. So I guess their roadies are still up there with a lot of Stories' equipment."

"Is their band all here, though?" Shep said.

"They're in town," Libert said. "I checked. They might have to rent some equipment or something."

"What about the stage passes?" Gordon said.

"I stamped up the backstage passes this afternoon," Libert said.

"But do you have separate passes that say stage?" Gordon asked.

"I thought the backstage would be enough," Libert said.

"Don't you remember the problems we had on the last tour?" Gordon said. "All kinds of people are going to be given back-stage passes, but only our performers and crew can go on the stage. How are the local security guards going to be able to tell who to let on? I don't want to have to stand at the side of the stage myself and say, 'He can go, he can't, he can go, he can't.'"

"Okay, I'll get some stage passes," Libert said.

Alice, on stage, was singing "Billion Dollar Babies" from a sitting position. The arena was cold, and everyone seemed to be anxious to get the sound check over with, and go back to the hotel.

"Hey, Artie," Alice said into his microphone.

Artie King, at the sound console, looked up.

“Do you want ‘Hard Hearted Alice’ now?” Alice said. “I’m not saying anything, I just want you to know that the quicker we finish, the quicker you’ll get to see the fourth quarter of the Oakland game.”

The sound check was completed within ten minutes. Alice, Mike Bruce, Dennis Dunaway, and I got into one of the Cadillac limousines. Also in the car was Norm Klein, a thirty-nine-year-old former professional wrestler, a short, muscular man with a shaved head and a black handlebar mustache. He had been hired as Alice’s personal bodyguard for the tour. He and Alice would seldom leave each other’s sight until the tour ended. They would share hotel suites, eat their meals together, travel in the same cars, go out in public together. Norm would kneel at the front of the stage during every performance; his sole reason for being on the tour was to see that Alice was not injured or killed by a fan who had taken the Cooper myth too seriously.

Our limousine backed out of the arena’s stage vehicle entrance, and was immediately surrounded by teenagers banging on the windows and pressing their faces against the glass.

One boy saw that Alice was in the back seat, and began talking animatedly in Alice’s direction. Alice noticed that no sound could get in or out of the car, so he smiled at the boy, and said, “Hi! Didn’t I meet you at Robert Hall? Didn’t I meet you at your mother’s Tupperware party?”

The fans, delighted that Alice was apparently trying to talk to them, pressed harder against the glass.

“Look at that one,” Dennis Dunaway said. “That kid is gonna grow up warped.”

A young girl pushed her way close to the car, and smashed her nose and cheeks against the car window closest to Alice.

Alice smiled and waved, and began talking again. “Put a bag over her head,” he said in a W. C. Fields voice. “Turn her upside down, they all look the same. Put a quarter in her ear and her teeth fold back.” The girl was jumping up and down with excitement, wishing that someone would roll down the window so she could hear what Alice was saying.

Some Nashville policemen cleared the crowd away from the limousine. We headed for the Sheraton, and Norm Klein proceeded to laugh in a high, piercing shriek at every word Alice uttered. None of us knew it yet, but Norm’s grating laugh would continue for the duration of the tour, and cause more than one Cooper traveler to wear cotton earplugs whenever in his presence.

After Norm had shrieked his approval of Alice’s humor approximately seven times, Dennis Dunaway said, without looking at the bodyguard, “Norm’s a great yes man.”

“It doesn’t say in your contract that you have to laugh at every joke, Norm,” Mike Bruce said.

“Yes it does,” Alice said. “I saw the contract. There’s a clause that says ‘Build his ego.’”

We pulled up to the hotel, two and a half hours from the time the show would hit the stage for the first performance of the tour. Alice yawned. “What time does ‘All in the Family’ come on here?” he said. “Seven? And ‘M.A.S.H.’ at seven thirty? I guess we’ll miss ‘Mary Tyler Moore’ tonight.”

In the lobby, Rebecca Segal was waiting for us, with Xeroxed copies of an addition to the tour schedule: a concert in Toledo on December 13.

“I don’t like this,” said the Amazing Randi. “I wanted to be in Toronto on the thirteenth.”

“You wouldn’t have been,” Rebecca said. “You’d have been in Ann Arbor, anyway.”

Most of the band got into the elevators to go to their rooms until show time. Mike Bruce and I, though, headed for the hotel restaurant, to examine the menu that was posted by the door, informing us that inside was “a place of merriment... for those who delight in all things fine and noble.”

“You know,” Mike said, “I don’t know why I feel so down on the first night of the tour. But I do, I just keep asking myself, why am I doing this. But... it’s to set Alice up in his movie career, I guess.”

We decided against dinner, and went to our rooms to wait for the show.

At seven o’clock, just as Archie Bunker was coming home from work on the hotel room color television set, the phone by my bed rang.

“Bob?” the voice said. “Dave Libert. I don’t know if anyone explained to you about the one-hour calls. Every time we move—from the hotel to the show, from the hotel to the airport, anything like that—you’ll get a call one hour in advance. Then we’ll call you again an hour later, right when we want you in the lobby of the hotel. So don’t ever worry about setting an alarm or anything. It’s our responsibility to wake you up and get you where we’re going. This is your one-hour call for the show.”

Through my window, I could see a long line of headlights slowly moving toward the Municipal Auditorium, about a

mile away. I called room service and had a sandwich sent up, and I paced as I ate it. The TV shows dragged. I looked at my watch every two minutes. I tried to read a newspaper, but kept putting it down. At 7:45, there was a knock on my door. It was Rebecca Segal. “Just didn’t want you to worry about your costume,” she said. “I have it here with the others. It’ll be at the hall.” I went back to my pacing, and watched the traffic.

A few minutes after eight, the phone rang again. I picked it up, and before I had a chance to say hello, Libert’s voice said, “Show time!” and then he hung up.

I left immediately for the lobby. When I arrived, Libert was on the house phone, calling the others. Two chauffeurs waited by the hotel’s front door, their black Cadillacs idling outside. Libert and I were the only Cooper people in the lobby.

“It’ll be a few minutes,” he said. “Usually we don’t leave until eight thirty, and the band knows that we’re early tonight. Also, they tend to realize that the show isn’t going to start without them.”

“Did you hear anything about the airplane?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Libert said. “We don’t get it. Bunky called back, and said that if it was up to him, we could have it, and the Allmans could fly home commercial. But the band won’t do it. Bunky said, ‘How can we tell *Gregg Allman* that he’s got to ride *commercial* home, when he *knows* he doesn’t have to?’ Bunky asked me what I would do if I was in the same situation with Alice, and I have to admit, he has a point.”

“So what are you going to do?” I asked.

“I got lucky,” Libert said. “Piedmont’s got a flight to Greensboro with one stop, tomorrow afternoon. I called one

of their supervisors, and asked if he had thirty seats, and he said yes. I couldn’t believe it, on this short notice. I asked him if he could guarantee we could have all thirty, and he said yes. I was as strong as I could be about it. I told him I had his name, I told him that I was tape recording our conversation, I told him I didn’t care who he had to bump, we had to be on that plane. He swore to me that we would be.”

“So we’re set?” I said.

“I never assume we’re set,” Libert said. He smiled. “I also lined up a charter that we can have on an hour and a half’s notice if Piedmont fucks up.”

The band began coming out of the elevators. The instrumentalists were in new costumes, white satin sailor suits with white cotton sailor caps. “I had Rebecca start knocking on Glen’s door a half hour ago,” Libert said. “If we do that every night, he ought to be able to make it on time.”

The non-Cooper guests of the hotel who were passing through the lobby stopped in their tracks. They stared at the freakish sailors who were sprawled on the couches. The members of the band talked neither to the gapers nor to one another. This lobby waiting routine was their life, and they let the minutes pass in silence. The equipment men and technical crew were already at the hall, as they had been all day. The only tour people remaining at the hotel were the performers, an occasional girlfriend, and Libert and Rebecca. Shep was at the hall, overseeing the split of the box office money. Artie King, the big, Afro-haired sound engineer, was here at the hotel, to drive a rented station wagon behind the limousines and carry any leftover tour people to the arena. This would be the arrangement every night of the tour; we would not leave the hotel until the opening act was already on stage.

Glen Buxton wandered off the elevator and then, a few minutes later, came Alice, trailed by Norm Klein, who swiveled his head around the circumference of the lobby like a Secret Service agent smelling out potential assassins. Alice was not wearing the ripped leotards from the last tour; instead, he had on a sailor suit similar to the others', with the exception that his sleeves had been roughly ripped off at the shoulders. His face was painted up in his traditional grotesque fashion, and he had drawn the word "Mom" and a heart pierced with a dagger on one of his biceps.

"Hey," said the Amazing Randi, pointing at Alice's costume. "New!"

"Just something I threw together," Alice said. "Found it in the closet."

"Okay, let's go," Libert said.

Alice, Libert, Mike Bruce, Norm Klein, Bobby Dolin, and I got into the first limousine. Libert leaned out the front door until he saw that the other limousine and the station wagon were loaded, and then he said to the driver, "Now." We pulled away from the Sheraton.

After we had traveled for about a block, Libert casually said, "By the way, we don't have the Starship tomorrow." It was the first time he had mentioned it in front of the group.

"We don't?" Alice whined. "Why not?"

"The Allmans get it for one more day," Libert said. "We're all taken care of, though. I've got us on a Piedmont flight."

"Oh, shit," Alice said.

"It's cool," Libert said. "It's a jet."

“Yeah, but *Piedmont*?” Alice said.

Bobby Dolin, the hired keyboard man, slumped down in the front seat and muttered, “The tour will be half over before we get the Starship.”

Libert tried to change the subject. “This morning, after I’ve done ten thousand things, right?” he said. “I’m working on fifteen thousand more? And Shep says, ‘Did you do this and this and this and this?’ And I say yes. And he says, ‘Did you remember to have a toothpick if anyone in the band wants to get something from between their teeth?’ And I reach into my pocket, and I say no... no, I have no toothpick. And then Shep says, Libert dug into his jacket, came out with a pair of novelty eyebrows-nose-and-mustache-glasses, put them on, and began to scratch his ear and nod his head and talk in a perfect Shep Gordon voice: “And Shep says, ‘You don’t. You don’t have a toothpick, Libert. Why is everything falling apart? I just don’t know. Look Libert, if you don’t want to take the responsibility... just tell me. Before we go any further... what else did you forget? Did you forget anything besides the toothpick? You can’t remember what you forgot? Look, if there’s anything you don’t want to remember, Libert... tell *me*. If you don’t want to remember, you just tell me, *I’ll* remember…”

We arrived at the auditorium. Several hundred young fans who had not been able to get tickets milled around the periphery of the steel-and-glass circular building, but our driver honked at a big corrugated steel stage door, which promptly was pulled up to let our caravan inside, then just as promptly was pulled back down. We got out of the cars and found ourselves in a gaping, empty corridor that had been blocked off from use by anyone except those wearing official tour credentials. Shep Gordon was waiting. “This way,” he called, pointing toward a locker room door. We

followed him, passing a half dozen uniformed private security guards, and ended up in a dressing room usually occupied by athletic teams. There was a large buffet, featuring cold cuts and cheese fondue and fried chicken and bread and rolls. Two gray plastic garbage buckets had been filled with ice, and then with bottles of Coca-Cola, beer, fruit juice, and whisky.

“The tune-up room is right down the hall,” Gordon said. Mike Bruce, Dennis Dunaway, Glen Buxton, and Mick Mashbir lifted their guitars, which they had carried to the show in the trunks of the limousines, and walked toward the other room. It had been reserved, as per a clause in the Cooper contract, so that they could tune their instruments without having to listen to the chatter in the main dressing room.

Alice, Neal, and I filled up paper plates with chicken and slices of ham, and we sat down at a circular table. “Cards, Norm?” Alice said, and the bodyguard instantly produced a fresh deck. “Anyone for Crazy Eights?” Alice asked.

Neal was accompanied by his bride of four months, a baby-faced, nineteen-year-old blonde named Babette. Babette was a fashion model and, with *her* five-inch heels, she was well over six feet tall. She was wearing a short skirt, and her legs appeared to be no more than three miles long. She wore bright red lipstick and a fur wrap. She sat next to Neal in his white sailor suit, and they looked like the cocaine-and-quaalude age’s version of the Ken and Barbie dolls. Tonight Babette, for some reason, was not in the most loving of moods. Perhaps it was because Neal seemed more occupied with his first night of drumming on the tour than with her, but whatever the cause, Babette was pouting and snapping at her husband. For his part, Neal was trying to be as solicitous as possible, without giving up his food and his

opportunity for a preshow card game. As we ate, Babette began jamming her hand in and out of her purse.

“What are you doing?” Neal said, kindly and inoffensively.

“Looking through my purse,” Babette said, in a slow, icy, exasperated monotone.

“Oh,” Neal said, still unruffled. “Well, don’t let me stop you.”

“Don’t worry,” Babette breathed. “I won’t.”

Alice shuffled the cards. “Now, Babette,” he said. “Be nice to Neal, my career depends on him twirling the drumsticks like an asshole. He could have been Gene Krupa.”

Through the cinderblock walls, we could hear the opening band go into their encore. The bassline and drumbeats shook the dressing room.

Alice sighed. “I feel as if I’ve done this before,” he said. “Do we really have to go out there tonight? Why can’t they just give us our million and let us retire? We promise that we have the potential to entertain you. Save gas, just give us the money…”

A little boy on crutches came into the dressing room, accompanied by one of the local promoter’s assistants. The boy was perhaps eight or nine, and he wanted to meet Alice. So he was lifted up and allowed to sit on the buffet table, and Alice went over to shake his hand and to talk to him. They seemed to hit it off right away; the boy giggled and laughed as Alice told him jokes, and the Amazing Randi did the handkerchief-into-a-cane trick for him.

“Hey, Bob,” I heard. I turned around, and in the doorway of the dressing room I saw Donny Arnold, a nineteen-year-old

roadie, motioning to me. “Come with me,” he said. “I want to make sure you know where all your stuff is.”

We walked down a hallway, then past a whole platoon of security guards, and suddenly we were climbing up a flight of wooden stairs onto the back of the stage. The opening act had just finished, and now the house lights were up, and the Cooper roadies were setting up the final bits of our equipment. Donny led me toward the on-stage dressing room. He was the youngest man on the tour; the previous spring he had been hired as a local equipment assistant when the band was playing his home town of Fayetteville, North Carolina, and he had been such a hard worker that he had been invited to stay on as a permanent crew member. He had said yes, had left Fayetteville, and now was in love with the life of a full-time roadie.

Donny pulled back the black curtains nailed to the frame of the dressing booth. The band’s first changes of costumes were hanging from metal hooks, each with a label bearing the name of a musician taped above it. “Your stuff won’t be hung up until the last people scheduled to change before you have been in here,” Donny said. “We made you a bag to throw some presents out of, and that’ll be with your costume. There’s some tee shirts in the bag for you to toss out.”

We walked around to the front of the stage. The last equipment placements were being made, and the roadies were tapping their fingers against the microphones to make sure they were working. A “Jingle Bells” instrumental tape was playing. The auditorium was packed, and the people were standing up, craning their necks toward the stage, in anticipation of Alice Cooper. They were stamping their feet and clapping in unison, and I could feel the stage shaking beneath me in response to their motion. I could not see an

empty seat in the hall. Shep Gordon was surveying the crowd too. “They had to turn six hundred people away,” he told me. “That kills me. I hate to turn people away. This is the first time in two years that this building has been sold out. They’ve cleared fifty-three thousand dollars; that’s a record for the hall.”

The lights flickered out, the crowd roared, and the instrumentalists ran out to their places in the darkness. I walked around to the back of the stage again, and found Alice and Norm Klein. Alice was leaning against the side of the on-stage dressing room, his. eyes closed.

“And now!” came the amplified, screaming voice of David Libert, over the auditorium’s PA system. “Will you welcome... on the first stop of their fabulous Holiday Tour... America’s own Billion Dollar Babies... the legendary... ALICE... COOPER!!!”

The guitarists hit the first note of “Hello! Hooray!” The arena was filled with the sound of howling fans. Alice yawned, and then turned to me. “As you can see, I’m a bundle of nerves,” he said. And then he walked out through the smoke, toward the beams of the four Super Troupers.

Norm and I headed back around toward the front of the stage. We edged our way along the left side, staying out of the illumination of the spotlights. Twenty feet away, Alice was staggering toward the people in the front of the hall, who were now pressing against the barricades and calling to him in full-throated fury. Gone was his studied boredom; he was Alice the monster-man now, and the audience was buying it. He growled and grimaced as he sang, and behind him, the musicians who had slumped silently in the hotel lobby an hour ago were also at work. Quiet Dennis Dunaway leaped and twisted in the colored lights as he hit his bass guitar. Neal Smith raised both arms high above his drum kit,

twirling his sticks and smashing them down, then raising them again for the audience to see. Mike Bruce pounded his right leg on the stage as he tossed his hair from side to side and led the band with his guitar. The two hired musicians, playing in back of the regular Cooper group, unobtrusively gave strength to the music. Only Glen Buxton looked somewhat out of place as he slowly, lazily picked at the strings of the guitar, a private smile on his face, looking neither at the audience nor at his fellow musicians.

I hopped up onto the metal table at stage left. The Amazing Randi was already sitting there, and he leaned over to me and shouted in my ear so that he could be heard above the awesome din of the music. “Do you have something for your ears?” he yelled. I shrugged my shoulders.

He ripped two small pieces of gray foam rubber from the inside of an equipment crate, and handed them to me. “Stick these in your ears,” he shouted. “Larry Hitchcock will be getting regular earplugs for us all tomorrow.”

I leaned close to his face, and shouted, “I don’t need them.”

“Yes, you do,” he shouted back. “Everyone uses them, even the musicians. You’ll lose your hearing if you stand up here every night without them. We all do it. You can still hear the music, it just keeps out the most damaging sounds.”

So I rolled the foam rubber into little cylinders, and inserted them into my ears. It did help in muting some of the most painful blasts from the speaker system; I had not noticed exactly how loud it was on the stage until I had put the plugs in. Randi leaned over to shout again, and I could still hear him through the plugs.

“Don’t ever come out here without them,” he yelled. “It only takes one or two really bad notes to put out your eardrum.”

The show was strong, and the audience was mesmerized. I didn’t know if I was imagining it or not, but Alice seemed to be trying to be less ferocious, less perverse, than the night I had seen him in Indianapolis or the nights I had seen him earlier in the band’s career. He appeared to be holding himself back from taunting the crowd outright, from overplaying some of his most shock-provoking opportunities. In any event, the audience didn’t notice; they were buying Cooper-the-madman as advertised, and Alice’s attitude wasn’t changed enough for them to see. They thought they were watching an animal.

During “Dead Babies,” I looked up on top of one of the crates that supported the PA boxes. The little boy on crutches had been given a folding chair there, right on the stage, and he was looking at Alice with pride and happiness in his eyes. Alice was singing about little Betty being dead, and was tearing the baby doll’s legs off, and the young boy seemed to be almost ready to explode with pleasure, at the sight of Alice on stage combined with the memory of talking to him in the dressing room—Babe Ruth calling his home run shot for the little boy in the Chicago hospital, updated for the ’70s.

When Alice had been beheaded and then reborn, and the band hit the opening chords of “School’s Out,” I walked quickly back to the dressing room at the rear of the stage. I ducked under the black curtains. There was a single lightbulb glowing in the little room. Above my head, the stage floorboards were vibrating under Neal’s drums, and the sound of his playing filled the room. I had purposely been trying to avoid thinking about going out there on the stage. Now it was time, and I was breathing hard with nervousness, at the prospect of first getting changed in time and then going through with the routine itself.

The show schedule called for the band to finish “School’s Out,” then to run offstage, wait a few seconds for the obligatory demands for an encore, and then race back on and play a song called “Working Up a Sweat.” Then they were to go off stage again—and then we were to go out for the mugging of Santa Claus.

Midway through “School’s Out” I finished putting on the costume, so I sat on the dressing room chair, looked up through the cracks at Neal pounding away, and thought of what my friends back in the city room in Chicago would think if they were to walk in now. Two of the roadies, Goose Graham and Donny Arnold, pulled back the black curtains. “We thought you might be nervous, so we brought you this,” Goose said, handing me a paper cup full of vodka and ice. I nodded thanks, and tried to drink it through the slit between the mustache and beard of my Santa Claus outfit.

The band finished the song, and came down a flight of steps from their level of the stage, to the dressing booth. Alice, Mike, and Neal stuck in their heads. “You’re not going to back down on us now, are you?” Mike said. I shook my head.

The crowd was crazy, bellowing for them to come back, so up they went again. They began “Working Up a Sweat,” and I picked up the black bag of gifts, and got ready to make my entrance. Shep Gordon came into the dressing area just before I was ready to leave. “Don’t throw anything from the bag tonight,” he said. “Carry it with you, and tease the crowd a little, but you can’t throw anything. We were just told that there’s a city ordinance in Nashville against throwing objects into an audience, and if you do it, you and I may both be arrested. You look great. Let’s go out to your end of the stage.”

We walked along the back edge of the stage, toward stage right. Because of the multi-level construction of the set, with

the highest levels toward the rear, the audience could not see anyone who was standing on the very back ledge of the main stage—the higher levels, which were constructed on this base stage, blocked the view, so it was almost like standing behind a scenery backdrop on a theatrical stage. This narrow back edge was where most of the roadies stood during the show, and they smiled and shouted encouragement to me as I passed them.

“Working Up a Sweat” ended, and the band came off stage again. They went down to stage left. I looked at them from my end and they looked back. The crowd was howling at its wildest level of the night. A quick-paced instrumental version of “Deck the Halls” boomed over the PA system. I could see the five of them, at the other end, run out.

“Go,” Shep said to me.

I walked toward the audience. They were in full ranting rush toward the barricade. “Wave at them,” I heard Shep shout from somewhere behind me, and I did. I looked out over the arena as I rumbled forward in the heavy red suit, and I began to laugh, and I couldn’t stop. Mike Bruce had been right: Don’t worry about it, just do it and have a good time. I waved and laughed at the crowd. I looked up into the darkness, and saw the beams of two Super Troupers panning, seeking me out, finally meeting as they converged in my face. It was blinding, almost intoxicating. To my left I could discern the shapes of the band, lit by two spotlights from the other side of the hall, making their way toward the center riser.

I moved along the front of the stage, swinging the black bag out toward the front rows as the people smashed against the barricade to try to get at me. The security guards inside the barricade furiously heaved against the crowd, trying to keep them back. “Me! Me!” the people shouted, climbing over one

another in a sweaty scramble to get the bag, to walk away with an artifact from the Alice Cooper show.

I turned toward the band. They were waiting for me. I walked up the stairs to their level, and Alice did a stage look of mock surprise. He yelled, “It’s Santa!” I waved to them, and said, “Which one of you boys is Ringo?”

By now the audience sensed that something was up, and they were all moving toward the stage, and screaming with mindless abandon. I turned and faced the crowd, and waved some more. Alice came around in front of me. “Santa!” he called, spreading his arms in greeting. Then he drew back and aimed a punch at my stomach. I fell back as his fist hit me, and he shoved me in the chest with both hands. I leaned back, and felt Dennis Dunaway crouching behind me. Over I toppled, waiting for Neal Smith to break the fall. As I fell, I looked up and saw that Neal was, in fact, in front of me, trying in vain to get around the others and catch me before I hit.

My head and back slammed against the stage floor, hard, and I felt myself go black. It only lasted a few seconds; when I came to, it took me a moment to remember where I was. The five of them were gathered around me, pretending to stomp and kick me, but they were staring down as they jumped about, waiting to see if I was going to wake up. “Whew,” Alice said, and rolled his eyes. I looked off to my left and I lay there, and saw the audience trying to scale the barricade so they could get in on the fun. “Kill him! Kill him!” screamed one boy of about sixteen, and I saw that he was pointing at me. I remember giving serious, if fleeting, thought to the question of whether this was any way for a grown man to be making a living.

The five of them picked me up and began to carry my allegedly dead body off stage, as the audience cheered its

approval. “Jesus, I’m sorry,” Neal said to me before we were even off the stage. “Are you okay? I got blocked out and I couldn’t get around in time.” I saw that Mike Bruce was carrying the bag of gifts, and that Glen Buxton was wearing my Santa hat.

“Come on,” Alice said. “Let’s get back to the dressing room. A whole month of this. I’m getting to be an old man.”

We were sitting in one of the limousines—Alice, Neal, Norm Klein, and I—waiting to leave the Nashville Municipal Auditorium. My head and my back were sore, but the evening had, unarguably, been fun in a strange kind of way, and I was feeling good. We were parked inside the arena, in the same area we had pulled into before the show. We were waiting for Libert to see that everyone was loaded in the other cars, and to give the go-ahead to start back for the hotel.

A pouty-mouthed little blonde with enormous stand-up breasts underneath a thin sweater appeared at an open side window of the car. She bent down to look in. “Hi!” she said. “I’m Candy!’ She had a languorous Tennessee drawl.

Alice looked out at her. “Oh, yes you are,” he said. “I saw you in the front row.”

“Will you come home with me, Alice?” Candy said.

“I’d really like to,” Alice said, “but this is our first night and everything…”

“Oh, come on,” Candy said. “I’m not with anyone.”

“Yeah,” Alice said. “When I was on stage, I was watching your... uh... pushups.”

“Those aren’t pushups,” Candy said, throwing her shoulders back. “I’m only but fifteen.”

“Oh, God,” Alice said.

“It’s okay,” Candy said. “You can come home with me. My mother likes you too, and she’s forty-nine.”

“Fifteen,” said Neal Smith.

“Will you sign this?” Candy said, and in the same motion she raised up her sweater.

“Oh, Jesus, Alice, do it,” Neal said.

Alice took a ballpoint pen, and wrote very carefully, on her stomach: “To Candy, Sincerely, Mr. Cooper.”

“You can still come with me, Alice,” Candy said.

David Libert jumped in the front seat of the car. “Okay,” he said. “Let’s go.”

We sped out over a ramp and past the waiting stage door people, who were fighting the police in an effort to touch the cars.

“I’m only but fifteen,” Alice said in a squeaky falsetto drawl, “but I blew Iron Butterfly last week, fourteen times.”

“Kiss my cold sores,” said Norm Klein, in his own Candy imitation, “I’m only but fifteen.”

“I didn’t get fucked until I was nine, so I’m still a virgin, sort of,” Alice cooed. “And that was by a German Shepherd.”

“Fifteen,” said Neal, shaking his head mournfully.

“Now if I was really as vile as I’m supposed to be, I’d have taken her back and fucked her,” Alice said. “I wonder if Candy realizes that I’ll go back to the hotel and beat off now.”

“Fif*teen*,” moaned Neal Smith.

The hotel was quiet after the show. There were several girls hanging around the lobby when we arrived, and a couple of the musicians took them up to their rooms, but mostly it was deadly.

I walked down to Libert’s suite. There was a large silver platter of cold cuts and bread on a table, and he picked at the food as he tried to get a four thirty a.m. flight for Larry Hitchcock and one of the roadies, so they could be in Greensboro early.

“Oh, damn it, I just remembered Glen,” Libert said. “I never gave him the new suitcase, and he’d never think to ask about it himself.”

We went to Glen’s room. The door was open, and Buxton was staring at the television.

“Here’s the suitcase,” Libert said. Glen looked over, wordlessly.

“You want me to fix it up?” Libert said. Glen shrugged.

Libert opened it up, and ripped out the plastic suit-holder, to give Buxton more room for his clothes. Libert started slapping Alice Cooper backstage passes all over the outside of the suitcase. He worked on the floor of the room, while Buxton continued to look at the TV.

“There you go, Glen!” Libert said, mustering false enthusiasm. He hoisted the suitcase, which now was covered

with the Cooper stickers. “Pretty nice, huh?” Libert said. “How rock and roily can you get, huh, Glen?”

Buxton said nothing. He stretched out on his bed and gazed at the television screen. I walked down to my room. Through my wall, I could hear a tape of the night’s performance. I looked at my room list. Artie King’s room was next door. As he had worked the sound board at the show, he had made the tape, and I fell asleep listening to Alice sing “Sick Things.”

EIGHT

It did not take long for the tour to insulate itself from the outside world. Thirty young rock and roll travelers tend to operate in a special society where they are the constant center of attention, and the mere fact of their presence makes them a local event. So by the second morning on the road, I was finding that we were already players in a game where the only rule that counted was whether one was inside the tour, or one was not. At the Nashville airport, waiting for our Piedmont flight to Greensboro, Neal Smith and I went to an arcade section to play the electronic tennis game; when we turned around, we found that a crowd had gathered to watch. The tour party's personal luggage—sixty-five bags, covered with backstage passes from around the world—arrived at the airport by truck, and the children in the ticketing lobby followed the porters as they carried the suitcases to the check-in conveyors.

If there was a hatred among the adults at the airport for the concept of Alice Cooper, it was not apparent. They watched us move about the concourses with a mixture of giddy curiosity and pop reverence; it did not seem to matter *why* the name Alice Cooper was famous, the important thing was that they had heard it before, they realized it was prominent, and they were excited that their own worlds were intersecting with the big-time rock and roll world here at the airport. The sight of the thirty of us groggily trudging along the corridors, herded by David Libert and Rebecca Segal, spoke to the outsiders of money and fame and a style of living that allowed a crew of sloppily dressed young men to flit about the country with a troupe of friends, behaving exactly as they wanted to and becoming rich while doing it. There was unhidden envy in the eyes of many of the businessmen we passed. They saw Alice, his shirt open to his waist, guzzling a bottle of Budweiser at 11:30 on a Sunday

morning as he examined the magazine rack—and they might not have approved of what he looked like or what he stood for, but they surely understood one thing—that they had to live by a whole set of rules that were stiff and inflexible, while this boy named Alice was making his fortune by his very rejection of those rules.

The unspoken credo of the tour party seemed to be: Move among the natives, but be cool, ignore them, pretend you don't notice they are trailing along after you. So when about twenty of us—performers, managers, roadies—sat down in twenty plastic chairs, and popped twenty quarters into twenty portable rent-a-TVs, and switched twenty channel selectors to CBS' "The NFL Today," I found that I was the only one of us who was staring back at the jam-up of other travelers lined up opposite our chairs and watching us watch television. It was fascinating to see them peering up and down the row of us, whispering and pointing as if they were at a wildlife preserve, where the exotic creatures could neither talk nor think very clearly. And in a way, the gapers were right, because I did not see a single member of the tour party look up from the TV screens to observe their audience. Libert passed in front, running the gauntlet between us and the airport gapers. Alice, without lifting his head or offering a preliminary greeting, said, "Libert, where's my bag?" and Libert said, "The blue one? I have it, it's at the gate," and the airport audience repeated the exchange for each other, in hushed tones.

We lined up to go through the security check procedure, and the airport guards were deferential and full of quick good humor, asking us questions about where we'd been and where we were going, and hardly bothering to look in the carry-on bags at all. The autograph seekers, who had been too timid to approach before, now converged on the line in front of the security desk. When a young boy came up to me

with a pen and a sheet of paper, I started mumbling about writing a book, and not really being a rock and roll type, and just playing Santa Claus every night—until Mick Mashbir, the hired guitarist, said to me, “You’d better get used to it. You’ll find the easiest thing is just to sign for them, otherwise they’ll think you’re trying to be rude. They don’t want to walk away without something on their paper.” And so I learned to accept the sheets of paper and silently scrawl my name.

A Piedmont gate agent let us pre-board the empty plane before any of the regular passengers. Libert had taken care of everything; we never saw a ticket, and the stewardesses never asked for them. The plane was configured all coach, with no first class section, and the thirty Cooper travelers selected seats at random, all over the airplane. Immediately the tour people started noisy blackjack games in the aisle. Several of the roadies brought out cassette tape players, and Goose Graham blasted an old album recorded by Rod Stewart through the fuselage. Libert put on his Shep Gordon novelty glasses and began doing imitations, and Norm Klein let go with the first of the three hundred and fifty shriek-laughs he would grace us with during the day. As the regular passengers boarded, they were greeted with a party scene that seemed to frighten and upset some of them; one woman tried to find a seat, and started physically trembling as she passed Goose, who was singing along with Rod Stewart and stamping time with his boots on the back of the seat in front of him. A pretty blonde girl in her early twenties entered the plane, saw what was going on, and said to Libert, “Are you guys a group?” Libert, behind the glasses-nose-eyebrows-and-mustache, said, “Oh, no, we’re a bunch of brain surgeons on our way to a convention in Greensboro,” prompting more noise from Norm Klein.

A stewardess went from seat to seat, asking us to put our carry-on baggage under the chairs. When she got to Andy Mills, the English roadie, she said, “You’ll have to put that suitcase under your own seat.” “But I don’t want to let it out of my sight,” Andy said, “it’s a snake.” The stewardess said that it would have to go in the baggage compartment, in that case; Andy said, “It’s not doing anyone any harm now, is it?” The stewardess called for a supervisor, who told Andy the snake would have to be stored in the belly of the plane. David Libert went forward and tried to argue the snake’s defense, but in the end the airline won.

During the first leg of the flight, the aisle was continually filled with tour members running around, shouting the results of card hands, kneeling to talk to one another. Norm’s screeching laughter seemed to silently enrage some of the regular passengers. The stewardesses attempted to keep the aisle clear, but to no avail. The tour people were used to having their own charters, and if Libert couldn’t give them one—well, then, they’d make this flight their charter. I could see the loathing in the eyes of some of the other passengers, and I could identify with it; had I been a non-tour passenger, and walked onto the airplane to be confronted with a boisterous, rude, mobile party that was obviously closed to outsiders, I would have resented it too. This was different from the scene in the airport. There, in a big public facility, the outsiders could watch the rock and rollers for amusement, as long as they wanted, and then walk away. Here, they had no such opportunity. They had paid for tickets, and now they were finding that they were in the middle of an airborne revel that looked like it could become a riot on a moment’s notice.

There were others in the tour party who, from the expressions in their eyes, seemed to be sharing my displeasure at the situation. Alice, for one, was going out of

his way to shrink into his seat and try not to be noticed. Mike Bruce, and Shep Gordon, and Bobby Dolin, too, appeared to realize how disturbed some of the other passengers were becoming. Shep even offered to switch seats with a man so that the man and his wife could be as far away from the tour people as possible. But no one not Shep, not Alice, not Libert—made a move to ask the others to calm down. Even after the stewardesses had gone on the PA system repeatedly to ask the tour people to stay seated, even after, during a stop in Asheville, a local policeman had been brought on board to stare us down and hopefully do something to restore order, no one in the Cooper party asked any of their companions to lay back, to take it easy. To do so, it was implicitly understood, would have been somehow outside the rules. On tour, everybody is a star, and a star behaves precisely how he feels like behaving.

If, to outsiders who happened to encounter the tour by chance, the Cooper entourage seemed to be occupied solely by frivolity bordering on anarchy, the impression inside the tour was somewhat different. The conversations were entirely parochial, and they centered on one subject: the show. The country was in the midst of a massive energy crisis, the President was in danger of being impeached, Christmas was coming. But the idea of hearing any of the tour people discuss any of those subjects, except in a manner related in some way to the show, would have been unthinkable. While we were on the road, there was only one topic of importance, and that topic was us.

We were to go to the Greensboro Holiday Inn-Four Seasons. The limousines had been waiting for our Piedmont flight to arrive, and a crew of roadies had been left behind at the airport to stay for our baggage. Within two or three minutes of landing, we were en route to the motel.

Shep Gordon looked tired. He had been up most of the night reading; when I had asked him if his reading matter had been any good, he had replied, “Contracts. All contracts.” The contracts dealt with an apartment complex in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area that Gordon was arranging for the band to purchase. In fact, the major financial reason for this Holiday Tour was to earn the money to pay one of three large installments that each member of the band was committed to forward to the apartment developers. Thus, Alice, Mike, Neal, Dennis, and Glen would not walk away from the tour with a lot of pocket money—but, if Shep’s figuring proved correct, they would be collecting income from the tenants of the Minnesota apartments for the rest of their lives.

As we rode to the motel, Gordon was also concerned about another matter. Just before we had left Nashville, he had received a telephone call from Ron Kelley, the truck driver. It seemed that one of our trucks had broken down two hundred miles from Greensboro. Rather than wait until Monday to get it repaired, Kelley was nursing it along toward Greensboro. But he could not drive faster than forty miles per hour, or the truck would fall apart completely, and now Gordon was worrying that the equipment and stage setting would arrive at the Greensboro Coliseum so late that it would have to be erected in full view of the audience.

Shep, Neal and Babette Smith, Mike Bruce, and I were riding in the Cadillac. “How’d we do last night?” Mike said to Shep.

“The auditorium grossed fifty-three,” Shep said. “We made thirty-two and some change.”

Shep was in the front seat. He turned around to look at Mike. “Did Dennis sound a little flat to you last night on his vocals?” he said.

“Yeah,” Mike said. “I listened to the tape after the show with Artie, and he agreed.”

“Will you say something to Dennis about it today?” Shep said.

“Well, I kind of tried to,” Mike said. “But it always gets difficult. You know how sensitive he is about his voice. He starts getting defensive about it.”

“I’ll talk to Artie,” Shep said. “He can take care of it on the soundboard.”

“I already told Artie about mixing the voices,” Mike said. “I told him to mix Alice’s vocals on top, then me and Bob Dolin down at the next level, and then Dennis down one level more.”

“You know, it’s Dennis’s birthday today,” Shep said.

Neal Smith laughed, and then began to sing: “Happy birthday, dear Dennis, you’ve been mixed out of the vocals.”

“Well, it’s just a question of what sounds right,” Shep said.

“When I noticed that my vocal microphone had been cut completely a couple years ago, I heard the music and danced,” Neal said.

“Shep, I want to ask you about something,” Mike said. “What did you think of Glen’s guitar playing last night?”

Shep didn’t answer.

“What did you think, Shep?” Mike said.

“I just told you,” Shep said.

“Oh, you mean nothing,” Mike said.

“On ‘Eighteen,’ we started to check and see if a PA had cracked, he was so bad,” Shep said. “It sounded like broken equipment. And ‘Hippo’ didn’t really work, either.”

“I don’t know exactly what to do about it,” Mike said.

“We’ll see how it goes tonight,” Shep said. “Try to read the audience during ‘Hippo,’ and see what you think.”

There were only four other cars in sight on the freeway. The President had just ordered all gas stations closed on Sunday, and our limousine-and-station wagon caravan rolled along toward the Holiday Inn with uncluttered dispatch.

“Three black men have been sentenced to die in North Carolina’s gas chamber, after being found guilty of raping a white woman last summer,” the handsome newscaster on the color television set was saying. “The men—Vernon LeRoy Brown, twenty-two, of Tarboro, Bobby Hines, twenty-three, of Princeville, and Jesse Lee Walston, twenty-three, of Washington, D.C., were sentenced this afternoon... In other area news, rock star Alice Cooper, whose ultra-violent stage routine includes the mutilation of a baby doll and ritual murder, arrived in Greensboro this afternoon. Cooper—he’s a ‘he’—and his band of Billion Dollar Babies will appear at the Coliseum tonight. Alice already is a millionaire, having appeared before more than eight hundred thousand people this year...”

Alice, his back to the television, gripped a new putter and leaned over a Titleist golf ball. He drew the club back, then tapped the ball. It went skittering over the high-shag salmon carpet in his motel suite, and stopped short of the ball-return machine. “This damned carpet,” he said. “The carpet at the Sheraton last night was much better. Get Libert. Call the manager. How dare he put us in a suite with a carpet I

can’t putt on? I’m only two-for-ten tonight, and I was seven-for-ten at the Sheraton. And can’t you get anything on that TV but news?”

Norm Klein shrieked with joy. The three of us, in the hour before leaving for the Greensboro show, were having a putting contest to kill the time. Alice kept pouring V.O. for himself and me; Norm, who would be perched on the front edge of the stage again tonight to look for potential Alice-killers, would not take a drink. Klein walked over to the television and turned to Lawrence Welk.

Alice was wearing his stage sailor suit, but had yet to apply his makeup. “Let me shoot again,” he said. “Give me a break. I have the second-night jitters.”

He studied his lie. “You know what I’d like to do?” he said. “I want to have an Alice Cooper Open. Bob Hope, Dean Martin, Spiro Agnew, cats like that. Money for charity. I bet Agnew would be okay. He’d probably be fun to play golf with. I bet he’s kind of like Ed McMahon. Agnew doesn’t have to worry about his public image any more. I hear he’s going to open up a hotel with Sinatra or something. I bet if he and I met each other, we’d get along really well.”

“Yeah, well, you’d better go put your stuff on your face,” Norm said. “You ain’t going to meet Agnew until after the show tonight, at least.” Alice went into the bathroom.

“Go ahead,” Norm said to me. “Dollar a ball. We’re keeping a running tally to the end of the tour.”

Norm, with his compact body, his shaved head and his big mustache, stood out among the tour party. As a professional wrestler, he had worked under the name of Tasor Tarkeno, until 1959, when he had been slammed into a turnbuckle at Chicago’s Marigold Gardens, and had undergone a hernia

operation. Now he worked a variety of odd jobs in Southern California, ranging from actor to carpenter. As Alice's bodyguard, he had found the perfect occupation. His affection for Alice approached idolatry. He shared Alice's odd enthusiasm for endless hours of television and trivia. On the road, the sound of Alice's jittery, nasal voice yapping back and forth with Norm's sharp, high-pitched one was a common undercurrent in airplanes, limousines, hotel corridors. Norm enjoyed being on the inside, knowing that the demented rock star who titillated the crowds from stages all over the world went back to his hotel room each night and turned into Fred MacMurray. And if Norm was blind to the vague sense of uneasiness that the others in the band were having because Alice had been given a personal bodyguard-valet—well, he was not being paid to be a psychologist. His one loyalty was to Alice, and he behaved in an almost panic-struck manner on the few occasions when the two of them were apart.

As we took turns knocking balls toward the putting machine, I asked Norm how he had happened to land the job.

"On Alice's last tour, I was working as head carpenter, on the stage crew," he said. "Then, when we were playing the International Amphitheatre in Chicago, two things happened. The first one was at the hotel where the band was staying. This guy was hanging around the hallway, outside of Alice's room. There was a party going on inside, and the guy wanted to get in. He was told that it was a private party, but he wouldn't go away, and he started getting hostile. I happened to be in the hallway, and I saw this going on, and I saw that the guy had a knife, so I went after him. I took care of him pretty good, and I got the knife away from him.

"The second thing was at the show itself in Chicago. There were some seats in back of the stage that were just a few

feet away from the band, really a low overhang. And this one kid in the balcony was shooting a soda-acid fire extinguisher right at the band. That stuff can burn you, really severely, if it gets on your skin. So I climbed up into the balcony and took care of him, too. Now, Alice had another bodyguard on that tour. But when it came time for this tour, they remembered, and they asked me to do it.

“I used to be Frank Zappa’s bodyguard. And when Frank’s band went to Europe, I wasn’t taken along, because of the cost. That was the trip when Frank was attacked from the audience, and thrown into the orchestra pit. I talked to one of the guys in the band, and he said that when he looked down into the pit and saw Frank lying unconscious down there, he just said, ‘Goodbye, Frank.’ He was sure Zappa was dead. That’s why there should never be a moment when you’re away from the star, if you’re a bodyguard.”

If Norm was something less than overly understanding about the tender egos of the other members of the Cooper band, who were already feeling a little left behind by Alice’s personal fame, and who were only too aware of the fact that Shep Gordon did not feel they were well known enough to warrant bodyguards of their own, that did not mean that Norm had no ego of his own.

“I’m a little upset,” he said. “In Nashville, and again here today, Libert told me that I was supposed to help Artie King pass the bags and suitcases out to everyone’s room, and then to pick them up in the mornings before we go to the plane. He said that I could do it because Alice was safe in his room at those times. Well, I did it yesterday, and I did it today. But that’s not my job. My job is to be with Alice. If Alice is sitting in his room watching TV, then my job is to be sitting next to him watching TV. That’s what Shep hired me for. Libert didn’t hire me, and I didn’t come along to be a

baggage handler. The first chance I have to talk to Shep alone, I'm going to get it straightened out. I'll tell you, I'm not happy about it."

Alice emerged from the bathroom, painted up and ready to go. "Let's have one more drink," he said. He poured us each one, and then he asked, "What did you think of the show last night?"

I said I thought it had worked well, but that I had probably been too nervous about doing my own part for the first time to pay any kind of detailed attention to the rest of the performers.

"I don't know," Alice said. "It was okay, I guess. But for some reason, I just didn't feel like I was on."

The phone rang. Norm answered it, then hung it up without speaking. "That was Libert," he said. "They're waiting in the lobby."

Norm put an athletic supporter cup and the bottle of V.O. in a satchel for Alice. We walked out of the room and into an elevator. "I met the greatest woman in California," Alice said. "Bela Lugosi's widow. She told me that those guys in the movies back then used to spend thousands of dollars on practical jokes. She said that they would do *anything* to get a rise out of their friends. She said that when her husband died, he was buried in his Dracula getup. And they were at the funeral, and Boris Karloff was passing by the casket, and he leaned down and said, 'Bela, if you're putting me on…'"

Norm squealed. The elevator door opened on the first floor. Libert was waiting. "Okay," he called to the others. "Into the cars." It was time to go to work again.

* * *

Ron Kelley had arrived with his truck just in time, and the stage was constructed five minutes before the doors opened at the Greensboro Coliseum. The audience threw hats to us tonight—sailor hats, boaters, tophats, watch caps. It became an instant ritual. I could see them fighting their way up to the front, holding the hats high above the crowd, and then picking out someone on the stage—Alice, one of the musicians, a roadie, Randi, myself, Norm Klein—and waiting until they caught an eye, then heaving the hats toward us, watching to make sure we touched it and put it on. Then they would tug on the shoulder of a neighbor, and point to whichever one of us had picked up the hat, happy that they had, in a certifiable way, linked up with the tour.

A few minutes before I was due to change into my costume, I went looking for a rest room. I first tried our backstage dressing room, and found that it had been locked, to protect the overcoats we had brought with us from the Holiday Inn. So I made my way through the sawhorses and security cops that blocked the rest of the Coliseum off from our protected area, and went into one of the public men’s rooms.

The amplified sound of Alice singing “Sick Things” carried through the walls. I thought I was the only person in the rest room, but then I heard a noise from one of the toilet stalls. At first, it sounded as though someone was ill, and I assumed that it was a boy whose drugs hadn’t agreed with him. But then I heard what had to be the sound of a second person coming from the stall. I looked over. Visible under the steel door were two pairs of shoes—a man’s pair of boots facing out toward the room, a woman’s pair of blue stacked heels facing the toilet. Just then, two building security guards came into the rest room, accompanied by a uniformed Greensboro policeman.

“They’re in that one over there,” one of the building guards said.

The policeman walked quietly over to the stall. The blare of Alice’s voice drowned out his footsteps. He arched up on his tiptoes, put his hands on top of the stall door, and looked in.

“All right,” the policeman said. “Come on out.” And he pulled open the door to the toilet stall.

A young girl was on her knees, sucking off a boy who sat on the toilet, his jeans tugged down to around his ankles. “Come on, now,’ the cop said, and the girl stood up. So did the boy, and he took his time before pulling up his jeans. Both were wearing carefree smirks.

“Now you come out here with me,” the policeman said. He led the boy and the girl back into the lobby, and asked them for their names and ages and addresses, and the names of their parents. The boy and the girl held hands, and smiled at each other; they gave the information without hesitation, and neither of them asked the policeman not to notify their parents. With Alice singing “Dead Babies” in the background, the policeman, who was in his early twenties and had sideburns and a blonde mustache, told them that they really shouldn’t be doing that sort of thing in a public place. The two of them grinned again, and shrugged. The boy had told the policeman that he was seventeen; the girl, sixteen. They walked back to their seats with their arms flung over each other’s shoulders. The girl was carrying her shoes in her right hand. When they are forty-five, they will no doubt hear “Dead Babies” on a dusty old album, and experience the same kind of moonlit memories that their parents fall into while listening to “Angel Eyes.”

The policeman watched them go back into the arena, then chuckled and tore up the piece of paper upon which he had

written their names. “Kids,” he said, and shook his head.

I walked back through the cordon of security guards, and made my way to the stage. I concentrated on Alice’s moves, as I had all evening, and the thing I thought I had sensed the night before now became obvious: he was holding back, not playing his vicious routine to the hilt. Again tonight, the audience did not know it; to them, Alice was a twisted legend, and they were ready to see what they wanted to see —and what they wanted to see was the mindless fiend that was supposed to be Alice Cooper. But the Alice on stage tonight was acting in a way that, in the years when the image was first being built, he would never have done. He smiled at the audience. He ad-libbed between songs, often going into a rushed, back-of-the throat, Henny Youngman “thank you, thank you” followed by a grin. At one point, he told the Greensboro crowd, “It’s great to be here in Toledo”— which, while perhaps not the height of sophisticated humor, was an indication of entertainer-like normalcy that he would never have let be seen even a year earlier. Before “Hard Hearted Alice,” he held a linger to his lips and said “Shhh... listen... shhh... hey, listen to this song.” He did not caress the breasts of the dummy. He did not stuff anything down the front of his pants. He did not spit. He did not touch his crotch. He did not let the snake crawl between his legs. At the conclusion of “Dead Babies,” he did not even chop up the doll, although the audience was screaming for him to do so. Instead, at the moment when he would customarily bring the hatchet down, he laughed at the audience, rolled his eyes, and tossed the doll away unharmed. When I came out for the Santa Claus act, just before he decked me he slapped my palms, basketball style. It was almost as if he wanted the crowd to know that the whole image upon which he had built his fame was a sham, a canard. But the reaction of the audience was the same as if they had just seen the devil, and later, immediately after the show, I walked around the

outside of the arena and listened to the fans as they left for their homes. Most of the conversations I overheard included references to how sick it had been when Alice had hacked the baby doll into little pieces.

The dressing room was bright and low-ceilinged and muggy. We all sat on long benches, or in pastel-colored Formica chairs, and tried without success to towel away the perspiration. The acoustics in the room were frightful, and everyone's voices echoed into a high-volume babble.

The Santa routine had gone off without a hitch. I had winced and braced myself after Alice had shoved me, but Neal was right there as I plunged backward, and judging from the highly vocal response from the audience, it had been a successful finale for the show. So I was in a good mood as I sat in the steamy locker room, gulped at a can of Coke, and waited for the signal from Libert that it was time to get into the limousines and return to the motel.

Shep Gordon, though, was not so happy. He stopped by and gave me a brief, friendly word of approval for my part. But he seemed preoccupied, and as soon as he saw that Alice was alone, he went over to him.

"The vocals, Alice," Shep said. "They're really bad."

"We rehearsed them so much in New York, though," Alice said.

"You didn't rehearse them, Alice," Shep said. "You ran through them a couple of times."

"Well, 'Dead Babies' sounded okay to me tonight," Alice said.

"Then you weren't hearing it," Shep said. "It was so far off."

“I can’t hear it, my monitors are bad,” Alice said.

“It’s not the monitors,” Shep said. “You guys gotta rehearse or something.”

Bobby Dolin came over. “I’ve got an idea,” he said. “We can stop the tour.”

“It’s pathetic,” Shep said. “You guys are going to just have to sit down and sing together before the next show.”

“But…” Alice said.

“You just have to do it,” Shep said. “I’ll get the technical part together. I’ll set up the speakers myself if I have to. You just need rehearsal.”

“But we rehearsed,” Alice said, “we know the parts.”

“That’s not true,” Bobby Dolin said. “We hardly went through any of the harmonies in New York.”

Alice looked coolly at Dolin. Alice was known for remaining in a state of perpetual good humor, but to have Dolin, who was, after all, a hired hand, contradict him in front of Gordon clearly did not please him.

A vacant-faced girl in a tight-fitting halter came into the dressing room. She had a backstage pass stuck to her left breast. She went straight to Mike Bruce and said, “Hello, Michael.”

The girl’s high, soft voice was almost lost in the room’s echo, and in the steady buzz that each of us carried in our ears for two hours after the show, regardless of ear plugs.

Mike looked up at the girl, and sang: “What’s your name, is it Mary or Sue?”

“Yivalda,” the girl said.

“What?” Mike said.

“Yivalda,” the girl said.

“We all know our parts, Shep,” Alice said.

“Yivalda,” Mike Bruce said.

“I met you once in Baltimore,” the girl said.

“We never have been able to do harmony on stage,” Alice said, “we never...”

“I know you guys pretty well, Alice,” Shep said. “If you just sit down and go through your parts together...”

“Do you know Amy Ginsberg?” the girl said.

“I met you in Gainesville?” Mike Bruce said.

“No, Amy *Ginsberg* ” the girl said.

“You’re *from* Gainesville?” Mike said.

“We know the harmonies,” Alice said.

“Alice,” Shep said, “if you’re not doing well in golf, you practice.”

“I’m not fighting you, Shep,” Alice said.

Libert burst into the room with the news that the police had cleared a path through the stage door crowd, but that it was uncertain how long the route could be kept clear for us. So we ran to the limousines and rode to the Holiday Inn, where a lobby full of girls was waiting for us.

Mike Bruce sized up the situation before he was even out of the car. “I got shut out last night,” he said. “Not two nights in a row.” He strode into the lobby, took a girl on each arm, and walked into an empty elevator.

“Look,” Alice said to me, as Norm Klein made menacing faces at the fans who were converging on our limousine. “Michael did it. I wish I wasn’t such a puritan. I could have a great time.”

We went up to Alice’s room. The TV was immediately switched on, the automatic putt returner plugged in. Alice poured himself a fresh drink, and announced that he had no intention of leaving his room for the rest of the evening. He asked Norm to make sure that no girls even knocked on the door. Alice and Norm were staying on a different floor from the rest of the tour party, as they would in almost every city, to protect Alice from the throngs. Alice said that he had heard that it was supposed to be warm in the morning, and that he wanted to get up at dawn and try to hunt up a golf course, so that he could get nine holes in before we left for Madison, Wisconsin.

There was a party in suite 535, Libert’s room, and there were at least five girls for every man. It was all green nail polish and glitter shrink tops and wrist-to-elbow costume jewelry. No one was saying much; the girls were all trying to give the impression that they had just been passing by, and were really right in the neighborhood anyway, and wasn’t it a coincidence that the tour party happened to be staying on this floor too? The tour men, knowing that they could take any of the girls to their rooms at any time of the night, were giving all their attention to a series of card tricks being performed by the Amazing Randi.

A tall girl in a black tee shirt with sequins on the front came over to a bed where Libert and I were sitting, and plopped

down between us. She offered no pretense of conversation. She stared at a wall across the room.

“Happy?” I asked her.

“Shit no,” she said, looking straight ahead.

“What, you don’t like living in Greensboro?” Libert said.

“Sucks,” she said, her eyes still on the opposite wall.

She ground out a cigarette on the carpet. “Are the roadies back yet?” she asked.

“No,” Libert said. “They won’t be here for a few hours. They have to tear down the stage.”

“My friend is interested in the roadie with the red shag haircut,” she said. “I’m interested in the one with the bushy shag. He seems like a very interesting person.”

“What time were you supposed to meet them?” I asked.

“We weren’t,” she said. “I haven’t met them yet. I just saw them on the stage.” Her eyes remained trained directly forward.

Dennis Dunaway came into the suite with Cindy Smith. For the tour’s sedate couple to make such a late-night appearance was reportedly rare, but it was, after all, Dennis’s twenty-seventh birthday. The Greensboro girls in the room, recognizing Dennis as one of the five actual Alice Coopers, fell silent. This is exactly the kind of thing that Dennis hated, and he responded by placing his cassette player on a table, punching the “play” button, and allowing Glenn Miller’s “Moonlight Serenade” to sound through the suite. When the song had ended, Dennis picked up his recorder, and he and Cindy left.

I walked down the hallway to my room. Within a few minutes, there was a knock on the door. It was two girls who had been in the party room.

“We saw you on the stage tonight,” one of them said, and they walked in.

“I was supposed to go to prison,” the other one said, as if to continue a conversation that we had begun several years earlier and had somehow never had a chance to finish. “For selling crystal and grass. But the judge gave me two years’ probation, and I have to go to a drug abuse center program every week instead of being in prison.”

“I was supposed to go to prison too,” the first girl said.

I was beginning to feel a little left out. “I was supposed to go to prison myself,” I said.

“What for?” the second girl asked.

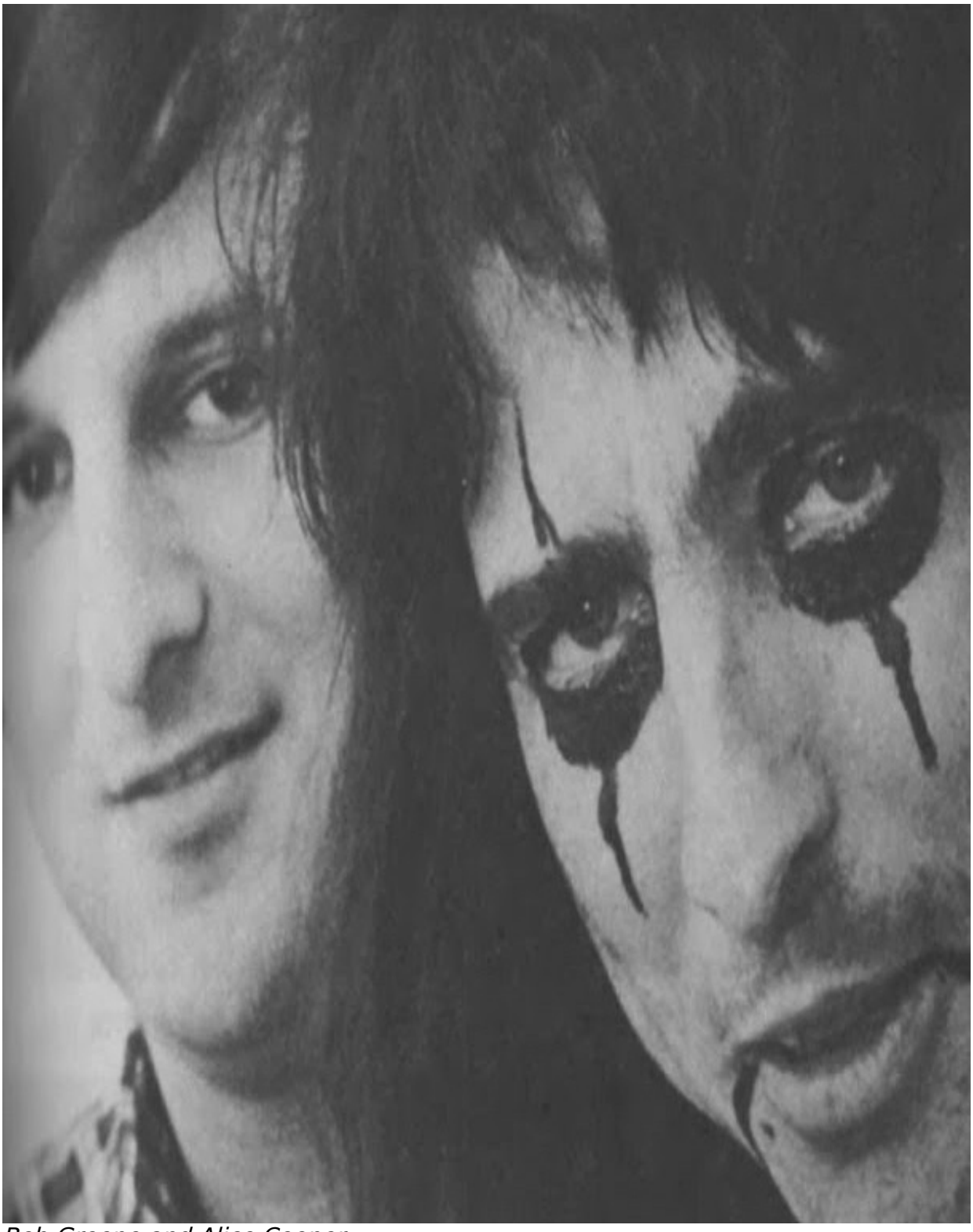
“I killed a man in Texas,” I said.

The girls nodded in unison. “Alice in any of these rooms?” the first girl asked.

“Alice has gone to sleep for the night,” I said. “He has a golf game early tomorrow morning, and he wants to be rested for it.”

“Sure,” the second girl said.

PHOTOS



Bob Greene and Alice Cooper

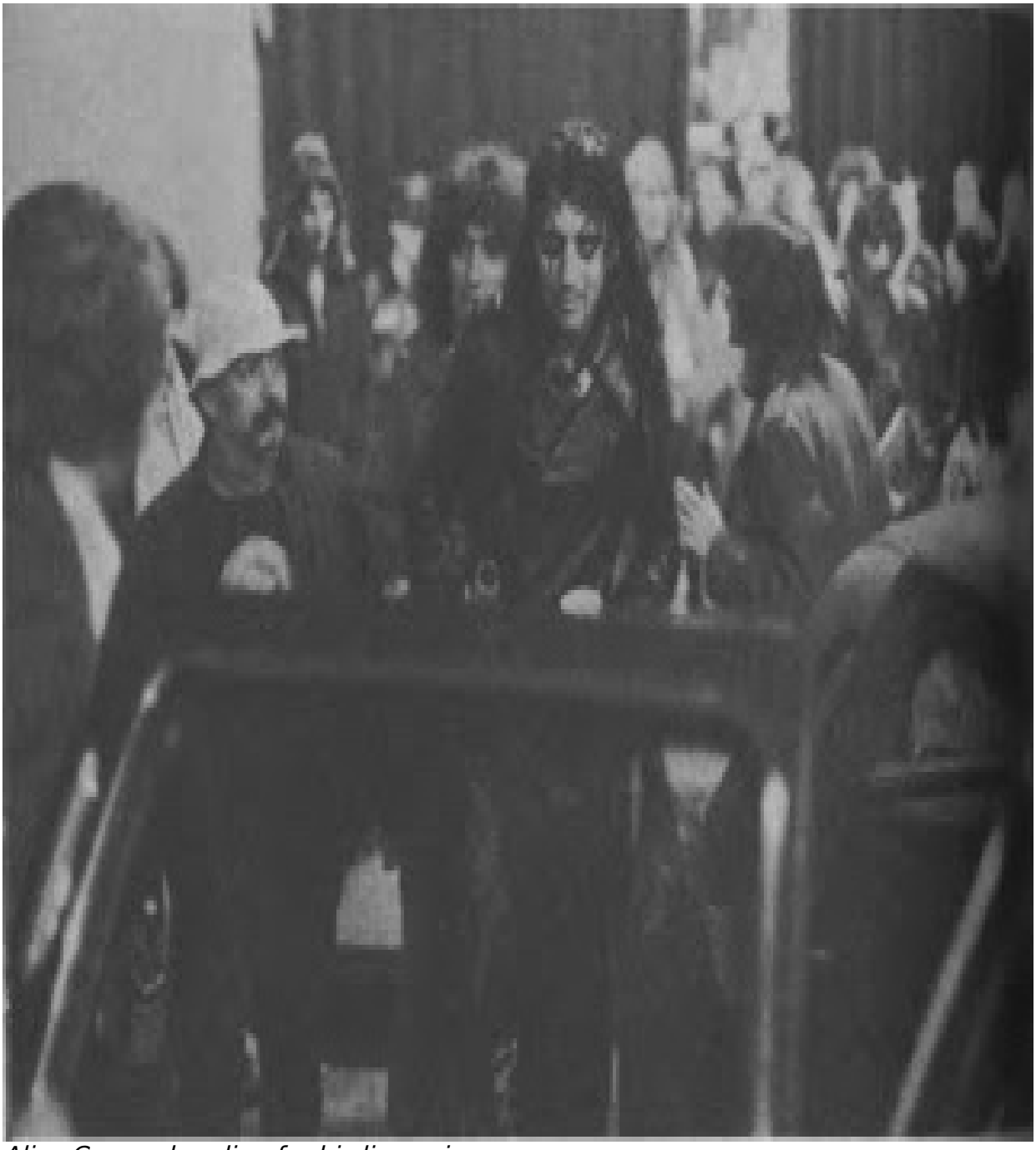


Bob Greene makes his Santa Claus entrance . . . *and his glorious exit* (BOB GRUEN)

Bob Greene as Santa Claus



Vince Furnier, aka Alice Cooper at work



Alice Cooper heading for his limousine



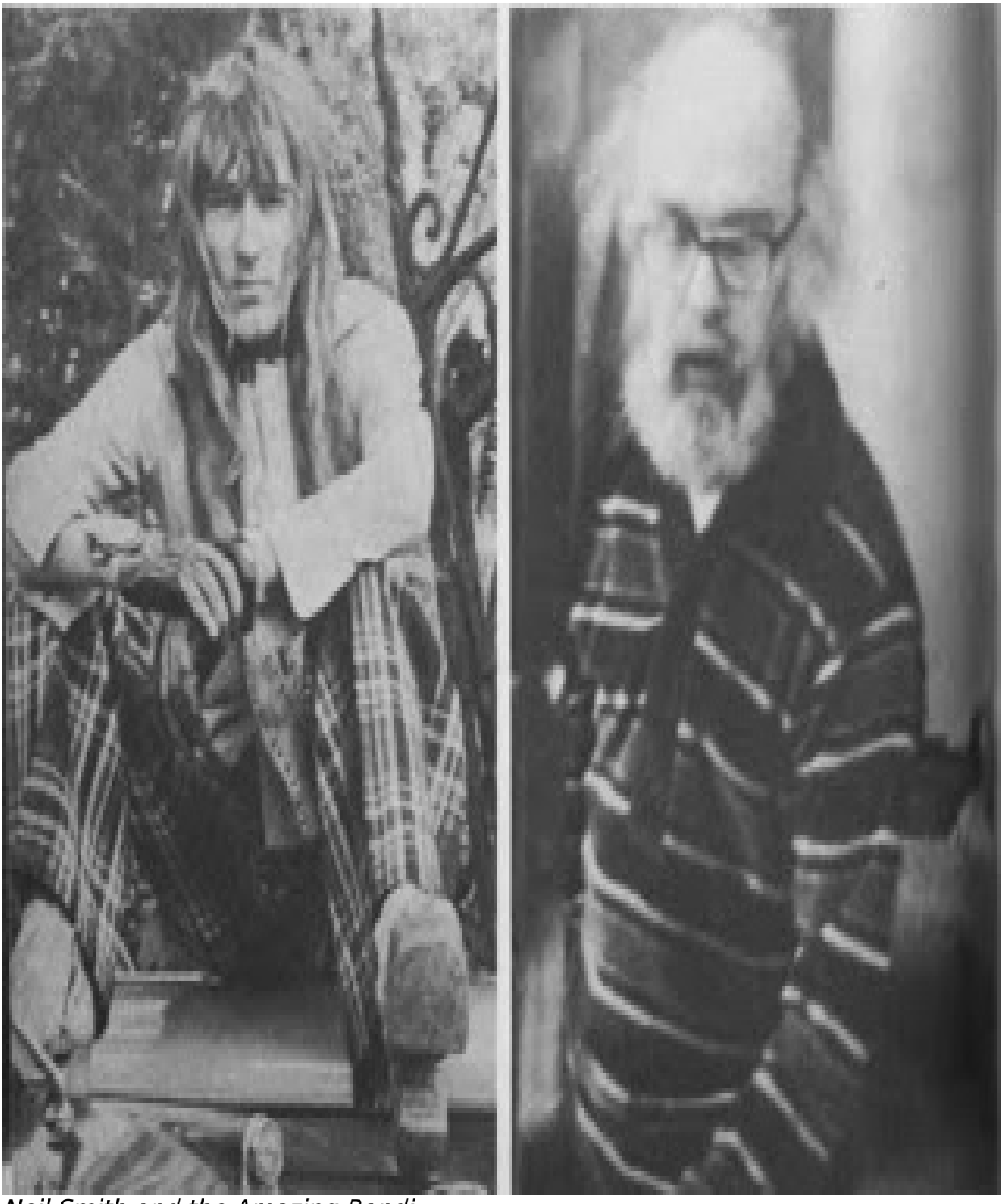
Rebecca Segal and Shep Gordon



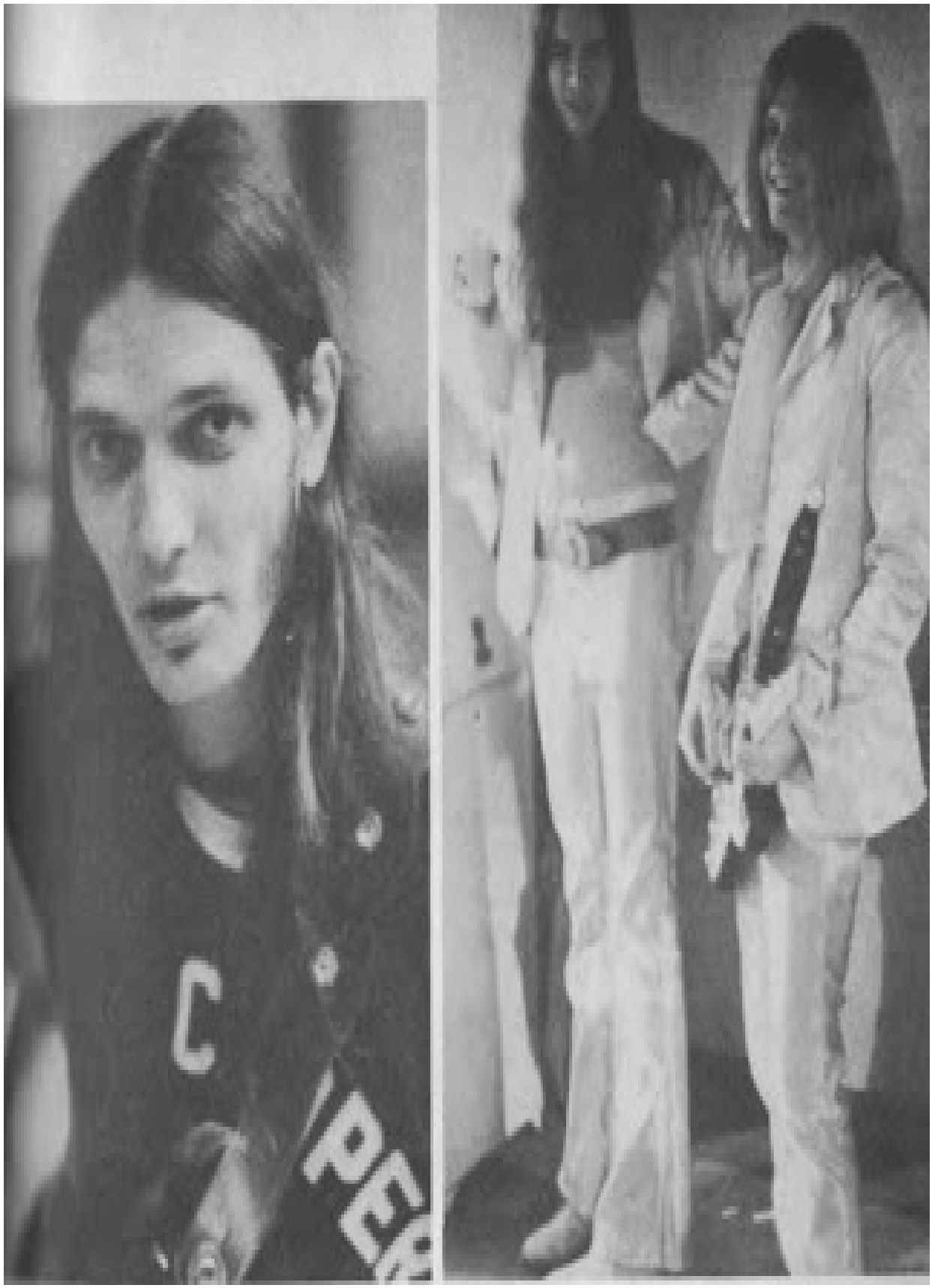
Glen Buxton, leaving the Starship



Mike Bruce



Neil Smith and the Amazing Randi



Dennis Dunaway, Bob Dolin, Mick Mashbir



Bob Greene and Alice Cooper relaxing before a performance

NINE

We were flying to Wisconsin in the early afternoon. I went down to the motel coffee shop to have breakfast before leaving. As I looked for a table, I saw Larry Hitchcock doing the same thing. We sat down together, and Hitchcock, a non-meat eater, ordered a meal of sole and squash.

“My crew is really tired,” he said. “We don’t have enough people, and for them to be this exhausted so early in the tour is bad. It’s just a matter of needing one more guy—it wouldn’t seem that one more pair of hands would make that big a difference, but it’s true. They’re dead on their feet. And starting with the show in Madison, we have six one-nighters in a row.”

Gil Crichton, one of the equipment men on Hitchcock’s stage crew, came into the restaurant, and we hailed him over. Crichton was a long-faced, brown-haired man in his early twenties. This morning, he was grinning broadly, and did not seem to fit Hitchcock’s prognosis of ragged near-collapse.

“Morning!” Gil said. “I feel great! Took a shower, had some sleep, got laid...”

Hitchcock put down his fork. “Wait a minute,” he said. “You got in at four o’clock in the morning from tearing down the stage. How’d you manage to get laid?”

“It just happened. Hitch,” Crichton said. “This girl just got into my bed. There were four of them in Andy’s room when I got back to the motel. One was fat, and one was vomiting all over herself from quaaludes. Mine was kind of cute. But dumb. I mean *unbelievably* dumb. Never did get her name.”

“Well, at least it sounds like the tour is finally beginning to take shape,” Hitchcock said. “When the road crew starts to

get raped in the middle of the night, things are close to normal."

I asked him if this tour really did seem different to him. I mentioned what I had been sensing about Alice's unwillingness to go through with his most violent routines, and asked Hitchcock if he thought I was reading too much into it.

"No," he said, "I've been thinking the same thing. The road crew has been talking about it too. This looks like it's going to be a strange tour in that respect, because Alice just isn't showing much enthusiasm for what he's doing. He's a pro, so he still puts on a good show. But I have a theory about it, and I think it's this: I think that in the middle of that long tour last spring, when all the publicity was coming out and the band was hitting *Time* and *Newsweek* and the TV networks, Alice just got tired of being Alice. You know how smart he is, and I think that there came a time when he didn't like having to go out there and do that whole sick routine every night. But he's locked into it, in the sense that the show is still built around the same stage, and the same props, and the same songs. So he's avoiding it in whatever ways he can. He's not throwing the posters this time, because he didn't like the riots in front of the stage. He's not chopping the doll. He's staying back from the very front edge of the stage, so he's not having that taunting contact with the audience that he used to thrive on.

"All along, it was planned for Alice to develop into a big star. And so it finally happened, he really is a star, and I think he's probably fed up with the act he had to put on in order to make him famous and get him there. But what do you do? This is the biggest live act in the world right now, and it's built on the premise that Alice does all of these perverted

things on stage, and what do you do? I don’t even think that Alice knows what the answer is.”

The Starship was ready. The limousines took us from the Greensboro Holiday Inn to a private airfield, and there, among the Piper Cubs and the little Cessnas, was our home for the rest of the tour: a full-sized Boeing 720-22, which is an advanced version of the standard 707. The airplane was massive, with trans-Atlantic capabilities. Under normal conditions, it could comfortably seat 138 persons. In the midst of an international energy crisis, we were using it to transport thirty of us from show to show.

The outside of the airplane was painted brown and gold. I got out of the lead limousine and walked up the portable stairway and into the plane, and I burst out laughing. It was ridiculous; it was a dream. The first section of the airplane had the look of an elegant private club. Red wall-to-wall carpeting covered the floor. Against one wall was a long, multi-section couch, covered with an expensive patterned fabric. There were card tables and leather swivel chairs in this compartment; against the wall opposite the couch was a television set, complete with a cabinet full of videotape cassettes featuring movies from *Deep Throat* to *The Maltese Falcon*. Farther back in this compartment were more couches, and a second television set.

The next compartment back was dominated by a long, brass-topped bar. Behind the bar was a butler, who had already laid out a steak-and-salad buffet for us. Beneath the bar, the butler had arranged every conceivable kind of liquor. There were more couches and chaise lounges in this room. Built into the wall were tiny padded hideaways, where passengers could curl up and relax in privacy.

At the rear of the plane there was a short hallway, with framed paintings hung on the walls. Two rooms opened off

this hallway: a library-study, complete with easy chairs and work tables, and a master bedroom, with a king-size bed and an adjoining bathroom complete with full-size shower. There were no regular seats anywhere on the plane; except for the seatbelts discreetly tucked into the crevices of the couches, there was no sign that we were even on an aircraft. At strategic points along the walls of the plane, white headsets were plugged into stereo outlets; by twisting a dial, we could listen to the program playing on the television, or to our choice of record albums.

David Libert, who had been responsible for arranging the rental of the Starship, was walking up and down the aisles as the band got on board. “I know it’s not much,” Libert said, “but it’s the best I could do on such short notice…”

If Libert was expecting heartfelt appreciation from the tour party, or even a show of enthusiasm, he must have been disappointed. The Cooper travelers walked silently to their seats, plopped down, and started shouting for beer and soft drinks. The only comment about the Starship I heard came from someone I couldn’t see, who was just climbing up the outside ramp; the voice was shouting, “What the fuck is this? Why isn’t our name on the side of the plane? We’re paying for this plane, why didn’t they paint our name on it?”

The butler hurried around the interior of the plane, going from person to person. He carried a silver candy dish, filled with cellophane packets containing daily rations of multi-colored vitamin pills.

“Come on!” shouted Andy Mills. “Let’s have some morning porn! Get on with it!”

A stewardess walked out into the middle of the club room compartment. She was wearing Levi’s and a polo shirt. “Hi,” she said. “I’m Sandy. I’m only going to say it once, because

it’s boring. But here it is—no sitting in the swivel chairs during takeoff or landing. The same goes for the bedroom or the sitting room. Otherwise, the plane’s yours. Enjoy it.”

Sandy walked over to the television and plugged in a cassette. There was a flickering on the screen, and then the opening scenes of *Deep Throat* appeared. We sped down the runway, and up into the air, just as Linda Lovelace was giving the first demonstration of her oral dexterity.

As we climbed, the tour party gathered around the two TV monitors to watch the movie. “Whatever happened to the meaningful relationship?” Alice said. “I’m glad I’m not a swinger.” When the movie reached the glass dildo scene, Alice looked away from the screen. “God,” he said, “even I think that’s obscene. I wouldn’t go to see that. It’s too dirty. This should be illegal.”

Sandy and another Starship stewardess, named Susan, sat on the long couch and watched the action. Alice said to them, “Everyone who flies on this plane must ask to see *Deep Throat*. You must get bored seeing it.”

“Yeah,” Susan said. “This is the third print we’ve had of it. The first two got worn out. It’s kind of fun the first time, but it does get old. We’ve got another porn movie on board that’s much better. It’s called *Medallion*. It’s really... bizarre.”

“Me and John Lennon and Micky Dolenz from the Monkees and Harry Nilsson went to this party in California, because we heard there was a good pool table there,” Alice said. “And Linda Lovelace was at the party. Lennon just kept following her around and going ‘prove it!’ She really turned out to be a nice chick. She has this little scar by her mouth, but look, you can’t see it in the movie. I think they must cover it with makeup.”

We hit some turbulence, and the television picture blurred.

“Goddamn it,” Neal Smith yelled, “fix the color on this TV or we’re going back to Piedmont.”

Before long, the crowds around the TV consoles thinned out. At Alice’s urging, *Deep Throat* was turned off, and a black-and-white tape of the Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup* was screened in its place. Alice left the couch and went to one of the swivel chairs, which were closer to the TV set. He put on a pair of earphones, so that he could hear the dialogue better, and began laughing immediately. I picked up a magazine that he had been reading and had left on the couch. It was *Circus*, a teenage rock magazine, and there was a photograph of Alice on the cover. The cover story was headlined “Alice Cooper’s *Muscle of Love*—A Shocking Course in Pop Sex.”

The rest of the traveling party fanned out throughout the plane. Most of the roadies had been up much of the night getting the stage disassembled and loaded into the trucks, so they stretched out and slept, or talked quietly in small groups. The scene was far more sedate than the one on the Piedmont flight. Two or three of the tour people lit up joints; a couple more took a few quick snorts of cocaine.

As soon as Alice smelled the marijuana, he began to look around. He got out of the swivel chair, and motioned for Libert to come over. The two of them stood out of earshot of the rest of the passengers.

“But I thought it was understood,” Alice said.

“Everyone was told,” Libert said. “They were told before the tour began.”

“Well, I just don’t want it,” Alice said. “I want you to take care of it.”

“Okay,” Libert said. “I’ll try.”

Libert quietly walked through the airplane. Whenever he saw someone using dope, he called the person aside and told him to stop it. Most of the tour people were astounded. This was a private plane, everyone on it was known to everyone else, and they simply could not believe that, on a tour like this, they were being told not to smoke grass.

“What are you talking about?” one of the roadies said to Libert. “We’re not going through Customs or anything. Is there some problem? Is there some reason for this?”

“Give me a break,” Libert said. “It’s Alice. He just doesn’t want any dope on his plane. Don’t make it hard for me, okay? Wait until we get to the hotel.”

“But what’s his reason?” the roadie said. “Can’t you even give me a reason?”

“Look, Alice just doesn’t like to have any dope around him,” Libert said. “And it’s Alice’s show. So just play along with him, okay?”

The roadie dropped the remains of the joint into a hole in the top of his can of Coke. “This is beyond belief,” he said. “Busted by Alice.”

The flight was marked mostly by blackjack and beer, but it did beat commercial. It was snowing in Madison as we landed. Alice, wearing a tennis warmup suit and laughing at the sound of Groucho Marx’s “Freedonia” routine as it came through his headset, looked out the window and said, “Where are we, Montana? We ought to have some ski masks or something.”

And Norm Klein, ever at the ready, appeared with a yellow-and-green ski mask in hand. Alice tugged it over his head and looked at his reflection in the television screen.

“God, I look like one of those guys who kidnapped the Israeli Olympians,” he said.

Most of the other people on the plane broke into riotous laughter. Alice appeared startled. He had not been reaching for laughs, and the instant sycophancy seemed to offend him. “That’s not funny,” he mumbled to himself. The limousines were waiting at the foot of the ramp.

There was no concert scheduled for the evening; we were to be given the night off, and then stay on in Madison for a concert in the Dane County Exposition Center the next night. I wanted to take advantage of the free time to talk to David Libert about something that was beginning to bother me.

Since the first day of the tour, I had been having mixed feelings about the whole experience. On the one hand, it was great fun; I liked most of these people, they were good company and fine traveling companions, and it was a kick to be in their stage show. They had been open and generous about letting me into their world, and there was never a span of more than five minutes without renewed laughter and easy conversation. It was good times unquestionably.

On the other hand, I kept having to ask myself a question: would I, under any other set of circumstances, be tempted to spend time with men who acted the way these men did? More and more, the answer was beginning to come back “no.” All of the band members were entering their late twenties; they were, by every objective criterion, adults. And yet, in many ways, they often behaved in the manner of

spoiled six-year-old English schoolboys whose parents were monied and titled, and who knew that they never had to worry about taking any responsibility for their own lives, because there would always be nannies and manservants who were paid to do that for them. As America's young royalty, these rock and roll stars were used to a life where they never had to deal with a hotel clerk; never had to call an airline office; never had to know what time they were supposed to be up in the morning; never had to decide how they would get from one geographical point to the next; never had to think about balancing a checkbook; never had to be precisely on time for an appointment; never had to be aware even of what city they were in.

Thus, while the rest of the country was lining up at gas stations in the hope of obtaining half a tank of fuel, the Alice Cooper band could order their limousines to stand by with engines running (so that the interiors of the Cadillacs would not be chilly when they finally decided to take a ride); when Neal Smith wanted a vodka gimlet, and room service was closed, he could call Libert and order a chauffeur to drive across town to find an all-night liquor store. When Glen Buxton walked outside to discover that Wisconsin was not North Carolina, and that he had not dressed warmly enough, he could merely call out for clothing, and have a roadie provide him with a sweater or a jacket within fifteen seconds. When they were performing in a town where their hotel shut down its restaurant and indoor swimming pool at eleven p.m., they could return from the show at midnight secure in the knowledge that both the restaurant and the pool would be open and waiting for them, because they had come to expect their employees to take care that special arrangements be made as a matter of course.

They could talk for hours on the most banal of topics, and be sure of a rapt audience. They could discuss a neon sign they

had seen from the window of their limousine, or a pair of boots that they almost bought in Miami, or what Dr. Stillman said on Johnny Carson last night. Their subjects, or their degree of insight, did not matter. There would always be enthusiastic listeners—if not their paid employees, then a fresh crop of fans in every city who would be thrilled to be in the presence of these traveling heroes. And after the band had left town, their words would echo for weeks, repeated by the local disciples who had been allowed to listen, and who would tell others what Glen or Neal had said about the neon sign, or the Miami boots, or Dr. Stillman, not unlike proud mothers writing their sons' first gurglings in a baby book. This guaranteed attention for the simplest of pronouncements enabled the band to get by handsomely with only the smallest efforts at normal social graces. For example, the band was in the habit of treating the limousine drivers in each city as if they were invisible, never talking to them or saying hello or even ordering a destination; if the driver would say, "Where to?" the members of the band would sit in silence until Libert or another management man hustled up with the answer; it was not up to the band to know where they were going. On the limousine ride from the airport in Madison to the Sheraton Inn, though, it became obvious that the chauffeur did not like being ignored, did not like having his questions go unanswered. He began to cluck a little in disgust with the band, and so Alice decided to win him over. "Did you see that game last night... What's your name, again?" Alice said to the driver.

"Ken," the driver said. "Yeah, it was bitchin'."

"Dallas was pretty fucking good, weren't they, Ken?" Alice said.

And that was enough to do it. When we arrived at the motel and got out of the car, Ken said to me, "That Alice sure is a

nice guy. I didn’t know what to expect, with the reputation he’s got, and all. But I really did like him.” It had taken Alice two sentences—two sentences that Ken might have considered mundane and obvious if they had come from his own friends in Madison, but which he accepted as memorable gifts from Alice Cooper.

And even as I was noticing all of this, even as I was seeing all of the limitations that this fantasy child’s life was placing on the adults who were living it, I found myself taking full advantage of my own opportunity to share it for a while. I came from a working world of deadlines and specific responsibilities, of rushing to airports, and arriving in strange cities by myself, to go to hotels where I knew no one, and no one knew me. So I liked this new life; I liked knowing that if I overslept, the plane would wait. I liked having no responsibilities each day, other than putting on a funny costume at a certain time each night, and walking out on a stage to help entertain ten or fifteen or twenty thousand people. I liked having a road manager calling me to tell me what I had to do next, and where I had to be. I liked someone else checking into the hotel for me, and having my key ready in an envelope by the time I arrived in the lobby. I liked knowing that I never had to worry about how I was going to get somewhere, because there was always a chauffeured limousine at my disposal. I liked not having to wear a watch, because of the fact that time in my temporary world revolved only around the moment my traveling companions and I arrived at our destinations, and that other people would set their watches and plan their days around our arrivals. I liked showing up at a motel in a city where I had never been before, and knowing that there would be a lobby-full of young strangers waiting, and that any of these young strangers would be only too happy to provide myself and my companions with all the company we

needed until it was time for us to leave for the next city. I liked all of it a lot. And, in this context, I liked the band, too.

And I didn’t find it hypocritical that I could reconcile my doubts about the band’s pampered way of life with my own sense of pleasure in living that very life. Because I knew that for me, it was not going to last very long. At the end of the tour, I would be going back to the real world, with all the problems and worries and responsibilities that had always been there. The others would not. They would be living in this special world of theirs until the young fans who made that world possible decided to reject them. Had the members of the band been merely rich young men, the life they were leading would have made them almost pathetic to anyone they met. They would have been thought of as slothful and dull and juvenile. But they were not just rich young men. They were rich young popstars, and that made them the exception. Oh, in rambling moments they would talk about the years of “dues” they had paid, living five to a room and stealing food. And it almost made sense, until the realization came that now, after all of that struggling, they were twenty-six years old.

So as popstars, they could be as helpless and as dependent as they wanted, and it did not matter, because it came with the territory. Just like the Starship. If, in a time of a severe national energy shortage, with the President asking every citizen to help conserve power, a politician or a big businessman were found out to be flying self-indulgently around the country in a mammoth plane, the politician or the businessman would be reviled and loathed by his fellow citizens. But for the Alice Cooper band, this kind of extravagance was accepted. Even expected. Far from trying to hide the plane, the Cooper press agents called up television stations in every city we were due to arrive in, and invited film crews to come to the airports and record our

landings. We were children flaunting and giggling at how ingenuous we could be.

So I wanted to talk to Libert about it. As the road manager, he was the person who had to assume all of the responsibilities that the man-children in the band would not think of accepting for themselves. The term “road manager” was misleading, for Libert’s job was a full-time, year-round one; he had to take care of them when they were *not* working, too. I never saw him when he was not carrying in his head a list of twenty things he had to do. Some were always major tour functions—check the box office receipts, meet the local promoter to arrange security guards for the show—but most were without exception piddling errands for his five charges.

After we had arrived and checked in at the motel in Madison, Libert and I sat down together to talk. I told him what I had been thinking, and he began to nod his head in agreement.

“What I am, to a large degree, is a baby sitter,” he said. “I have to treat these guys like babies, there’s no question about it. Look, they even call the show ‘Billion Dollar Babies.’ You’ve seen how it is. Something goes wrong for a second, something makes them uncomfortable, and they’re yelling ‘Libert, Libert.’ I have to bury my own ego completely, which is okay, that’s part of the job. I have to wait on them hand and foot—wake them up in the morning, feed them, make sure they have a way to go outside if they want, know where they are at all times, make sure their things get from city to city. That’s how I knew it would be. When Shep hired me, he didn’t try to hide that fact. He was the one who wanted them treated like this, because he thinks that if you make someone *feel* like a star, then they just might become a star. So I do all their shit for them, and they can be stars. It’s okay. I get paid for it.

“They’re actually a little better now than they were even a year ago. Before, they all lived in one house and they just fed off of one another. For years and years, they would own cars, but they would refuse to drive them, even at home. The roadies had to chauffeur them everywhere. Now that they’ve gotten their own houses, they’re starting to drive again.

“Glen’s the worst. He can’t function. Literally. He gets up five minutes before we’re supposed to leave the hotel, no matter how many times he’s been told how inconsiderate that is to everyone else. I have had to virtually break down his door. I’ve had fist fights with him. He simply won’t learn. Neal and Dennis are fine about that. Alice is perfect—I call him an hour before he’s supposed to be in the lobby, and he’s there, right on time. Mike’s a little trouble. But, even now, we’re talking about the simple act of getting up in the morning.”

I asked Libert how he managed to keep his equanimity while serving as nursemaid for the band. He had been a rock and roll star himself, not so long ago—how did he manage to put all of that behind him, and resign himself to serving as an errand boy for every whim of the five men in Alice Cooper?

Libert shrugged. “First of all, I like the challenge,” he said. “Before Shep hired me, he couldn’t keep a road manager for more than a few weeks. The band was driving every road manager crazy. The constant harassment would just wreck the road managers who were trying to do the job. So when I took the position I decided that I would just accept the band as they are, and do what had to be done. I do like them, you know. I like them very much. But just because I like them doesn’t mean that I’d want to be them. I wouldn’t. Man, some day all of this is going to be gone for these guys. And when it is... well, I just like having the feeling that I can take care of myself, that I don’t need anybody to do anything for me. Last year we’d been on the road for months and months

in a row, and I hadn’t had a day off the whole time. I was just about to drop. So we had a three-or four-day break, in Denver. Everyone on the tour flew home to New York, except I think it was three of them in the band. They wanted to stay in Denver for some reason. I wanted to get the hell away from everyone, and just be by myself for a few days. But Shep says, ‘You have to stay in Denver with the guys who stay there.’ I told him I was going crazy, that there wasn’t a show or anything, that I just had to get away. And Shep said that I had to stay, because ‘someone has to take care of them, get them cars, pay their bills, look out for them at the hotel.’ Well, okay, that’s my job. But I’m glad that’s not me, who needs that kind of looking after. I never want to be like that.”

I asked Libert if there could ever be a reversal—if Shep or someone could decide that it was time to stop pampering the band, time to start making them live a more realistic life.

“Never happen,” Libert said. “It’s way too far gone, now. They’re used to this kind of attention being paid to them. I really don’t think they could manage any other way now. It’s even written into their contracts.” He reached into his briefcase, came out with a thick sheaf of paper. “Take a look at this,” he said.

It was a copy of a rider that was attached to the basic financial contract signed between Alice Cooper Inc. and the promoters of each local concert. The rider was full of detailed requirements that were designed to make life on the road for the Alice Cooper band as free from discomfort as possible. A few samples:

Purchaser (promoter) shall provide two (2) limousines, one (1) bus and two (2) station wagons on arrival of performers at the airport. The limousines shall be at the disposal of the performers for their use until their departure the following day after their performance. Cars, station wagons, “airport limousine buses,” or any other vehicles may not be used in place of limousines. Only Cadillacs or

Continental limousines with no wording on the cars are acceptable. All the aforementioned vehicles must be equipped with drivers, with the exception of the station wagons, which will be driven by Alice cooper personnel.

In the case of performers arriving via private aircraft, all of the above transportation will be required to receive clearance from the airport allowing the vehicles to drive directly to the aircraft.

Purchaser (promoter) shall provide three (3) cases of Budweiser, three (3) cases of Michelob, one (1) gallon of apple juice, one (1) gallon of orange juice, two (2) cases of Coca-Cola, one (1) case of ginger ale, and assorted fruit.

This is to be placed in a cooler with ice in Alice cooper's dressing room. Additional food appropriate to the occasion is encouraged. The Michelob beer must be in bottles and the cases of Budweiser must be in cans. In states where the sale of beer must have an alcoholic content of less than 6 percent (i.e. 3.2 beer), the beer must be imported from another state.

Libert watched me read. "So it's not exactly a coincidence that they get used to being spoiled," he said.

I asked him if, with all the amenities provided for them, the band remained relatively happy on the road.

"No, they always find something to bitch about," Libert said. "Now the other four are saying that they want more publicity for themselves, because of all the publicity Alice is getting. I tell them, look, you're making the same money as Alice. You each get an equal cut. And because of all the publicity about Alice, the group is making more money, and each of you is making more money. You want to put Alice down, so you make less?

"It's the same thing with press conferences. Before the group got really big, all five of them would show up at press conferences, all together. Alice was beautiful at it, he knew exactly what to say, and what would get press. The others just weren't good. They were messing the press conferences

up. So pretty soon, Shep lined up an important press conference, and we just did it. I went around to each of the others before the press conference, and I was as blunt as I could be, I said ‘Look, you’re not wanted.’ They were kind of shocked and hurt, but the problem never came up again. Shep didn’t want them butting in, and that was the end of it.”

That night, I was sitting on the bed in my hotel room, watching television, when the phone rang. It was Norm Klein. He said that Alice wanted to know if I’d like to come down to their suite to watch the football game.

The hallway where the rest of us were staying was full of Madison teenagers who had heard that the band was in town and who were trying without success to find Alice’s room. I took the elevator down two floors. Alice’s hallway was empty.

He was wrapped in a blanket on a couch in the living room of his suite. The motel was freezing, because of a problem with the heating system, and Alice looked like the survivor of a shipwreck as he shivered and hugged himself and watched Howard Cosell.

Libert was in the room too, with a girl—the only one to penetrate the hotel’s security men and reach Alice’s suite. The girl apparently had met the band before; she kept chattering about things that Mike and Neal had said “last time,” and she hung to Libert’s arm.

Norm was on the telephone, talking to the night manager of the hotel. “We have to get some D-cell batteries,” he was saying. “Can you find out where we can get some? This is very important. We’ll send our limousines after them if it’s necessary. We have a piece of equipment for the band, and

we need those batteries tonight." Norm winked at me, and pointed at the putt-returning machine.

The girl with Libert had a young, full, pretty face. She wore a red sweater and jeans, and she talked constantly to Alice, who seemed uncharacteristically glum, and answered her only with grunts. "Alice, I read that magazine interview with Cindy," the girl said. "What did you think of it?" Alice huddled tighter under the blanket and did not answer.

The girl kept talking, bringing up names of musicians, and stories about albums, and details about her life and what she had been doing. Although she was with Libert, and stopped talking in order to kiss him from time to time, the target of all her remarks was Alice. Everything she said was directed at him. But Alice seemed unhappy to find himself here in Wisconsin on a cold winter night, and unhappier still to have this girl talking at him in his room.

She poured herself a cup of coffee, and then, while reaching for the cream, she dropped it on the carpet. Without making a move to clean it up, she said, "Alice, where's the beer?"

For the first time in fifteen minutes, Alice turned to look at the girl. "Your tits got bigger," he said.

"Yeah," Libert said, "that's what I was thinking too." And he lifted up the red sweater to expose the girl's right breast. She just smiled, and said, "Do you have any more beer, Alice?"

Alice yawned. "When we were in high school, the best thing you could do was drink a beer and get to first base with Debbie Hackney," he said. "Debbie Hackney was built like Raquel Welch. She was fourteen or fifteen years old. I understand she got married to a Sixty-seven Corvette."

A group of roadies arrived in the room to announce that they had found a club in Madison with a live band, and that they were going to take a limousine over, and did we want to go?

“Naw,” Alice said. “I just want to stay here and play poker.”

The roadies left, and the rest of us went over to a round table in the middle of the room. Norm broke out the cards. The girl pulled up a chair and watched silently.

“I kinda love you both,” Don Meredith said to Frank Gifford and Howard Cosell on the television set. That was about the apex of the conversation in the room, but the girl stayed on. She had made it to Alice’s suite, and she wasn’t going to leave, no matter how boring it got. Not even if it was beginning to seem like her father’s card night.

“Do you have any more of those *Muscle of Love* tee shirts, Alice?” she said.

Alice studied his hand. “Once Cindy and I gave these tee shirts from the *Killer* album to these bums in the Bronx,” he said. “They were all wearing Alice Cooper tee shirts with vomit all over them.” The response seemed to satisfy the girl.

There was a knock on the door. Norm answered; it was three young boys who had been hanging around the lobby. They wanted to know if Alice was in. “Wrong room,” Norm said.

Five minutes of poker talk later, there was another knock. It was one of the same boys, now wearing a white busboy’s jacket he had managed to snatch somewhere. “Here to pick up the dirty dishes,” he said, lowering his voice by several octaves.

“I told you, son, you have the wrong room,” Norm said, and closed the door.

“Get security to clear out the place,” Alice said. “I like them, but I don’t want them out there.”

For the next thirty minutes, the only sound in the room was that of cards dropping on the table, and bets being called out. The girl began to fidget; then her eyes began to close; one time, she drifted off to sleep for a few minutes. Finally, she got up, said goodbye, and left.

“Nice tits,” Alice said.

“She’s growing up,” Libert said.

TEN

The ten of us who performed each evening could get away with telling ourselves that the only moments during the day that really counted were the eighty minutes on stage. That provided us with a rationale for staying semi-comatose all day, and getting tanked up in the two or three hours before we left the hotel for the show. But for the road crew, there could be no such luxury. They were committed to appearing at the local arena no later than eleven o'clock on the morning before a concert. Most of the time, they did not get back to their rooms until three or four o'clock the next morning.

On the day of the Madison show, I had the Sheraton operator wake me at ten, and I walked across John Nolen Drive to the Dane County Exposition Center just after eleven. It was bitter cold, and none of the other Cooper show performers had stirred from their rooms. The arena was locked up, all around; I circled it in the snow, and found a stage door, where our two trucks were backed up. Inside, our roadies were already wet with perspiration as they hoisted the ponderous Billion Dollar Babies stage into place.

The steps to the stage had not yet been unloaded, so I pulled myself up from floor level, and scrambled onto it. "Morning, Bob," I heard from high above me. I looked up, and Charlie Carnal was waving from atop one of the light towers. Charlie was a quiet, soft-spoken young electronic genius who had designed the Cooper light show. He had grown up with the band in Arizona, and had traveled with them from the beginning. Until this tour, he had shared and equal cut of the tour money with the musicians. But now he was on salary; Neal Smith told me that on the long spring tour, Charlie had made more than a hundred thousand dollars, and after that it was decided that perhaps a light

man should not expect to be paid quite that handsomely. Charlie traveled with a case full of organic foods. When the rest of the tour party hit a newsstand and stripped it of *Penthouse* and *Oui*, Charlie would stand back and read the current issue of *Scientific American*, to catch up on the latest laser theories.

“Open the top,” a voice called, again from above. It was Jig Gillespie, perched high on the stage set superstructure. He was calling down to a locally hired stagehand, who was trying to figure out how to lift a piece of metal equipment up to Jig. “See that hinge on it?” Jig called. “Just put your hand there and pull back. That’ll give you a hold.”

I walked around the stage. The pieces of Plexiglas flooring, each numbered for precise placement, were being eased into position. Donny Arnold and Andy Mills were carrying braces onto the stage. One of the tour carpenters, Ralph Cafuoco, was shoring up the support beams. Lenny Cowles and Tony Mazzucchi, the electricians, were dragging the thick black power cables into place and hooking up the proper connections.

Out in the hall, local arena personnel were setting up the rows of chairs for the evening’s performance. I saw Larry Hitchcock sitting in the front row, going over specifications on a clipboard, and I went down to talk to him.

“I’m glad you’re seeing this,” he said. “No one understands just what the difference is between a normal rock and roll show, on a bare stage, and the Cooper show. The kids come in with their tickets, and they see our gigantic stage blinking and flashing up there, with all the different levels and the towers and the guillotine and all of the other effects, and they say, ‘Yeah, far out,’ and that’s the last they think of it. Which is fine, they’re paying to see the show, not to think

about the roadies. But the work these guys put in is incredible.

“We come in here with about a dozen of our own people. Then I arrange in advance to have twelve local stagehands waiting at the hall in the morning, and four local Teamsters to unload the trucks. And still, I have to allow at least six hours to construct the stage in every town. In cities where the unions aren’t so tough, I like it better, we can rely on our own guys to do almost everything, and they’re the best. But in tough union cities, I have to hire however many men the locals say are required. When we played Madison Square Garden in New York, I paid out twenty-four thousand dollars in one day in union fees.”

The Cooper roadies were wearing sweatshirts and overcoats; this was another ice hockey arena with a boarded-over floor, and the temperature was scarcely above freezing. They worked quickly, but precisely. The local stagehands looked at them with unhidden admiration. If the local union men had been expecting a bunch of drug-addled freaks, they were now experiencing a major surprise. The tour roadies were total professionals. They moved literally thousands of separate stage parts from city to city for the one-nighters, literally tons of equipment, and they did it with almost no sleep at all. They got none of the ego gratification that came to the performers in the form of screaming audiences, and they knew that when the show ended every night, they would still have hours of work to do in the empty, post-midnight coliseums. They may have looked like street panhandlers, but they worked with a sense of pride and craftsmanship and willingness to help one another that, to me, was the most impressive thing on the tour. Their world was made up of the strange-sounding terms that appeared on the official typed inventory of the traveling equipment: AC cable hampers, and master control cables, and one and a

half ton hydraulic chain jacks, and Skirpan dimmers, and twenty-four-foot Genie hoists, and interlocking steel trestles. They worked right up to show time every night, and then, when we pulled into the arenas in the limousines, they came into the locker rooms to offer us encouragement and tell us about the crowds and generally give the tour the feel of a traveling family.

During the shows, they knelt on the sides and the back of the stage, ready to dash out and repair or replace any pieces of equipment that might give out in the course of the performance. Whatever controversial aspects of taste the Cooper show might have had had no bearing on their lives. To them, the “Dead Babies” routine meant that a trunkful of baby dolls must be lugged from city to city; the beheading of Alice meant that the guillotine must be on stage at the right place every night; the rape of the mannequins meant that the body parts must be kept in repair. If the roadies were not here, they would most likely be in factories or machine shops somewhere. The tour gave them a touch of glamour, a chance to see the world first class. Their pay averaged around two hundred and twenty-five dollars a week for seven days of seventeen-hour-a-day physical labor. There was no overtime clause.

Even the band, whose cynicism and haughtiness toward the world at large was complete, was fully appreciative of the work their roadies were putting out. There were no class divisions on the road; the roadies were invited and expected to take their pick of seats on the Starship, drop into any of the performers’ rooms any time they felt like it, join Alice or Mike or Dennis or Neal or Glen in the hotel restaurants, use the limousines to get back and forth to the halls. The members of the band realized the unfathomable amounts of grimy, muscle-tearing work that the roadies went through each day in order to make the show look flashy and giant

and special, and they made sure that no one on the stage crew ever felt that he was just a body-for-hire. And it was a nice feeling at night, as I watched from the stage and waited for my cue, to glance over at Jig Gillespie or Ronnie Volz while Alice was singing “Muscle of Love” and see them dancing in place, big grins on their faces, raising happy fists of triumph when they saw that I was looking at them. It was their show too, and they shared in the elation of its successes.

* * *

Mick Mashbir and I were shooting a game of bumper pool in Alice’s suite. With a whole day in Madison before the show, Alice had grown restive, and he and Norm had taken a limousine to a toy store. The portable pool game had been their prize purchase and now, late in the afternoon, it was set up on the poker table from the night before.

Alice, Norm Klein, Bobby Dolin, and Shep made up our gallery. Shep had been off the tour for several days, taking care of business in New York. Even now, he had just stopped off in Madison for three hours; before the show, he would catch a flight for Chicago, and then for Los Angeles, where he had appointments in the morning. He was letting Libert take care of all of the standard road details until his return.

Alice was leafing through the twentieth anniversary issue of *Playboy*, which had just come out. He held the magazine up with his right hand, and let the gatefold flop down. “God!” he said, “Great! Look at the boobs on this girl!”

Alice displayed the Playmate for the rest of us to see. She was, indeed, astonishing; magnificent even by *Playboy* standards. Alice began to read the text block that accompanied the foldout, and after about thirty seconds he dropped the magazine. “Oh, no,” he said. “You are not going

to believe this." He handed me the magazine. I began to read:

January Playmate Nancy Cameron isn't the introspective sort, but on the even side of her twentieth birthday—which just happens to coincide with ours—we caught her in a reflective mood. "I've been thinking what would have happened if I hadn't gotten away from home." Home for Nancy was Arnold, Pennsylvania, a small town about 20 miles outside of Pittsburgh. "I'd probably have gotten married—to my very old-fashioned high school sweetheart—and most likely have settled for a career as a dental assistant." Nancy makes a face. "And I'd have never gotten to meet Alice Cooper." We should explain that Miss January works for her boyfriend, Paul St. John, a rock concert promoter in Pittsburgh. Nancy books hotel reservations for incoming groups, ensures that rooms are supplied with ample provisions of food and drink and arranges press parties and limousine service and the like. "Somebody was throwing a party for Alice after the concert and Paul wanted me to go," says Nancy. "But I told him I was tired and we argued about it. So I'm sitting home alone when the phone rings, and there's a man on the other end of the line saying 'Hello, Nancy, this is Alice,' and I hear Paul laughing on the line like it was some big joke. But Alice really was quite nice..."

The magazine passed from hand to hand, and the room was filled with moans, and the sound of people slapping themselves on the forehead.

"Jesus," Shep said. "Paul St. John. I'm going to start taking his calls."

"I remember that night," Alice said. "Paul kept asking me to talk to his girlfriend on the phone, he kept bringing it up, so finally I said all right, just to get it over with. I vaguely

remember him handing me the phone and telling me to say hello. Will you *look* at that *girl*?”

Shep stared at the gatefold. “Paul,” he said, “I think you may be just the man for that next gig in Pittsburgh.”

Shep Gordon, behind his calm, quiet facade, was probably the shrewdest manager in rock and roll. He had taken this band, which had no outstanding musical attributes, and had made it the number one stage attraction in the music business. I had run into a great number of rock and roll managers, and I had never met anyone who even approached Gordon as a promoter and a hustler. People in the rock and roll world liked to talk about how Elvis Presley had been cheated out of television exposure when, on a network variety program, the director had refused to shoot him from the waist down. Gordon laughed at that thinking; *his* theory was that Col. Tom Parker, Presley’s manager, had not let Elvis appear on television until he had a written *guarantee* that nothing below the waist would be shown. That way—'according to the Gordon theory—the newspapers would carry stories about the network “ban” on Presley’s crotch, and all of a sudden the music public would be able to think of nothing *but* seeing Presley’s crotch. Gordon had once put that kind of strategy to work for Alice, and it had worked to perfection. When the Cooper *School's Out* album came out, each record was scheduled to be covered with a pair of women’s paper bikini underpants. Alice was not yet a household word at the time—but that soon changed. United States Customs officials suddenly seized half a million pairs of the paper panties, which were being imported from England. The Customs men said that bringing the panties into the United States was a violation of something called the Flammable Fabric Act, and thus illegal. The Cooper people squawked, and the next day almost every newspaper in the country ran stories with headlines saying, “Alice’s

Panties Too Hot To Handle," and the like. People who had never heard of Alice Cooper were reading about him over their breakfast coffee.

It sounded like a lucky publicity break for the Cooper band. But Gordon had not depended on luck. He had heard about the Flammable Fabric Act long before *School's Out* was pressed, when a friend had laughingly told him that, for some reason, you couldn't bring paper underwear into the United States. So Gordon had quietly devised his plan. He had ordered panties from England. And he had discreetly let the Customs people know that the panties were on their way, and—in case the Customs men didn't realize it—that to allow them into the United States would be against the law. So the panties were held up at the border, the wire service stories went out, and Gordon told the world that the panties were meant to be used on an album called *School's Out* by a group called Alice Cooper. Even now, most of the other managers in rock and roll still thought that the Cooper band had stumbled into the publicity through random luck.

I was glad to see Shep back on the tour, if only for a few hours, because I wanted the chance to sit down with him and find out what was going through his mind. After all the work he had done for the band, he was finally realizing the payoff. The group had reached the absolute top of a field where over 99 percent of the hopefuls never got out of their home towns. But Shep, more than anyone else, was well aware of the fact that, without the gimmickry and non-stop publicity, the Alice Cooper band would have been nothing. He was aware that, without his constant control and direction, the band might still be floundering on the West Coast, playing clubs for a hundred dollars a night. And yet, while knowing that he was the man who was responsible for the group's fame, he was having to put up with a situation where all of the individual members of Alice Cooper thought

that they were true superstars, were born to be superstars, and would have been superstars whether they had ever met Shep Gordon or not.

It was Shep who had guided the band every step of the way, devising the outrageous, newsmaking stage atrocities that made them famous, and then wealthy. But now, with the deed accomplished, he had to sit still for the likes of a telephone call that he had received at three o'clock one morning, while he was sleeping at his home in New York.

Shep had groped for the phone, and grunted a hello. On the other end was Glen Buxton, calling from California. "I just read in the paper where we made five million bucks on the last tour," Buxton said. "Where's my million?"

Shep had drowsily explained that Glen *knew* that the five million figure had been hyped up for publicity purposes, Glen *knew* that the group's profit, after expenses and travel fees and promoters' cuts and booking agents' percentages and salaries and on-the-road luxury living was far, far less than five million, Glen had seen a true, professional accounting from the tour, and anyway, Glen had already been paid, right after the tour had ended. Shep had asked Glen why he was calling in the middle of the night; none of this was new, they had been over it all before, the band was fully aware of the technique of telling the press inflated, gross figures instead of the far smaller profit figures, for purposes of making the tour seem even more phenomenal than it already was.

"It says right here in this paper that we made five million," Glen had said. "You work for me, Gordon. I want my money wired to me—tonight."

Shep had slowly said that he would have been more than happy to wire Glen a million dollars, but unfortunately he

was a little short of cash around the house.

I knew that it must be especially galling for Gordon to have to continue treating the five band members like artistic geniuses, when he was only too aware of the reality of their specific talents. But the fiscal breakdown of the band's contract dictated the arrangement. Shep and his financial partner, Joe Greenberg, did, indeed, work for the group. The two of them split twenty percent off the top. From that, Shep paid a full-time office staff of fourteen. The five members of the band divided the rest of the proceeds equally. Alice, Mike, Neal, Dennis, and Glen each got the same paychecks. And they were each, when it came down to it, Shep Gordon's boss.

I wanted to ask him about the theory he had used to build the band—and about how he was feeling now that he had led them to such dazzling success. After the bumper pool game had broken up, Shep and I went off alone to talk.

"You're a star, you know," he said to me, and laughed. "Did you see the picture?"

I had. Just before we had left Greensboro, I had received a call from my city desk in Chicago. United Press International had just moved a story and a photograph about the Santa Claus finale. The story, datelined Nashville, had begun, "Santa got mugged and the crowd went wild." It had gone on to describe the show, and to identify me as the person inside the Santa costume. The accompanying picture had been a closeup of Alice slugging me on opening night—and of me falling backward, on my way to my collision with the stage floor. When I had gone to breakfast, I had bought the local paper—and there was the picture, given prominent display.

“Yeah, it looks like the Santa thing wasn’t such a bad idea after all,” I said.

“I knew it would get talked about,” Shep said. “This is the kind of thing that will keep appearing for years, too. I was at the office in New York, and we’re getting calls from all around the country asking about the Santa act. Newspapers will keep that picture in their files, and they’ll use it whenever it gets to be the Christmas season, and they need an offbeat Santa Claus illustration. The promoter of our Florida concert called me to thank me for it—he said that the papers down there had run it, and that ticket sales had picked up right away.”

I said I wanted to talk to Shep about his job. “You spend so much time at it, you must basically love it,” I said.

Shep shook his head. “No,” he said. “I’m sorry to say it, but I detest what I’m doing. I hate it. I hate going to work in the morning. I resent going to the office. When I wake up, I’m depressed at the thought of doing this all day. There’s probably not five minutes in a row when I’m not on the telephone, and I hate the telephone. You know how much I’m on the road, and I despise traveling. When this is over, I’ve promised myself that I’ll never do something that I don’t want to do again.”

I asked him why he was doing it, if he disliked it so much.

“My goal was to retire at thirty,” he said. “I have two years to go, and I think I’m going to make it. I’m not like the band. When I was a kid, I never wanted to be a rock and roll star. I’m a businessman. I grew up in Jackson Heights, Queens, and my father was an accountant who never became a C.P.A. He never earned more than ten thousand dollars a year in his life. My mother sold clothes in a store. I saw the way that we had to live, and I knew that all I ever wanted to be was a

beach bum with a million dollars. I just want to make my money and get out of this business, and go lie in the sun. And it looks like I'm going to do it."

He told me the basic story of his career, which I had heard before: He went to the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he pledged Sigma Alpha Mu fraternity and met his eventual business partner, Joe Greenberg. While their fraternity brothers went to classes, Shep and Joe ran poker games, played pool, went to the tracks at Buffalo Raceway, Batavia Raceway, Fort Erie. After college, he worked in the garment district as a cart pusher, then at Divine Garments, a manufacturer of clothing for the dead—for funeral use. He went to California, worked for one day as a probation officer, and quit. He and Joe Greenberg checked into the Hollywood Landmark, a rock and roll hotel. In the next room were the Chambers Brothers, at that time a hot recording act. The Chambers Brothers became friendly with Shep and Joe, told them about the music business, and said, "You guys are Jewish, you ought to be managers." This was in 1967.

One day, at a boutique, the salesgirl-seamstress started talking to them. Joe and Shep said that they were looking for a band to manage; the seamstress said that her brother was in a band, why didn't they come by and listen? The salesgirl was Cindy Smith, sister of Neal, girlfriend of Dennis Dunaway. Shep and Joe listened to the band, and decided to manage them. They signed a contract, and started the five-year drive that would bring them to the top of the rock and roll industry. Joe faded increasingly into the background as Shep took over the on-the-road aspects of building the group.

"I sensed right away that there was something different about this band," Shep told me. "You've heard the story

before about how I saw people streaming out of a club as soon as the band began to play, and knew that I had a winner. Well, that's true. I had never seen such a strong negative reaction. People hated Alice, and I knew that anyone who could generate such strong negative energy had the potential to be a star, if the handling of the situation was right.

"We decided right away to do anything we possibly could to attract attention. And we knew that the best way to do it was in a negative way that would offend people. We had to get publicity. The dead babies idea worked, so we expanded it. The more outrageous we got, the more it worked.

"I knew how important it was to get written about. I wasn't a big rock and roll fan, and you know when I became aware of the Rolling Stones? When I opened up the New York Daily News, and there was a headline about Brian Jones pissing in public, and getting arrested for it. Right there on page four. I knew that was the way to get people to think about you. Why do you think Sinatra punches people in restaurants? Because he feels it's necessary to pound a guy in the mouth? No. He does it to get in the straight press, which is a lot harder, and a lot more important, than getting in the music trade press."

I told Shep that I understood that way of thinking, but that I thought he was leaving something out. When a Sinatra, or a Presley, or a Rolling Stones, gets press because of notorious behavior, half the story is due to the fact that Sinatra, Presley, or the Stones are the protagonists. Even at the time of the Rolling Stones' public-urination arrest, they were already a big-name chart group. But Shop had reversed the normal publicity machinery. He had seen how eager the press was to print negative stories about popstars, and he had used that method for getting in print—even though the

Alice Cooper band was far from stardom at the time. Shep's gamble, as I saw it, was that the mass-circulation general press would print anything about a rock and roll group if it was sufficiently disgusting and opposed to standard morality—and that if the newsmaking actions were offensive enough, e.g., the killing of a doll baby in front of thousands of screaming adolescents, or the beheading of the star of the show, complete with simulated blood, or the rumor of the massacre of live chickens on stage—then it did not matter if the group's members were really legitimate popstars. Shep's theory, I thought, was that instead of getting negative items printed about prominent stars, he figured that he could take a group of complete unknowns, and make them stars by virtue of their adverse publicity.

"Well, you can say that," Shep said. "But I hope you can understand why I don't go around talking about it that way. If all the things that were used to build up Alice's name were made public, we'd be dead in five seconds. Because the magic would be gone. The fans don't want to hear that kind of thing—they want to believe that Alice is everything his image makes him seem to be. They want to believe that it just happened, that the Alice Cooper band members are such stars that their success was inevitable, that it had nothing to do with the way the band was managed or promoted. I can't go around talking about the methods I used to get them known, the calculations I made to get them in the straight press before anyone had ever heard of Alice Cooper. For me to say that kind of thing would only hurt the group. But you're aware of how it happened. When we first started out, this band was the biggest joke in the music business. Now they're the biggest rock and roll act in the world. Alice and Jagger are the only true household words in rock and roll. And as long as people are willing to believe that it just kind of happened, then I want them to go on believing that."

I asked him about the wisdom of pampering the five members of the band, of making them believe they were rare, special human beings with rare, special prerogatives—even during the time before they had made a hit record. Now that they were floating so high on their own egos, did Shep regret it?

“No,” he said. “That was a business decision, from the start. I decided that if they were ever going to be a supergroup, then they were going to have to exhibit that star confidence on stage, right from the beginning. There’s nothing an audience can detect as easily as a lack of confidence from a performer. So I determined as soon as I began to manage them that they would be treated like stars at all times. They would be waited on, catered to, made to feel like they were the most famous performers who ever lived. And so, even before the public knew who they were, the band was being treated like millionaires. That way, when anyone from the outside came in contact with our organization, they felt like they were dealing with stars. The band really did believe they were stars, and it carried over to the press people who interviewed them, and the people who saw them play. We just took over their lives, took over their senses of independence, and taught them to live this fantasy life where there was always someone around to do their bidding. It was the best thing for their careers—I don’t think there’s any doubt about that. Whether it was the best thing for them as human beings—well, I’m not so sure about that. I’m afraid that they’re all going to find out, in the end, that they’ve paid a very high price for their success.”

I asked him how he had come up with the idea of making Alice the single symbol of the group’s horrid excesses, instead of passing the spotlight around to everyone in the group.

“That came about through an understanding of how the media work too,” Shep said. “At first it was just that—five people running around all over the stage. But I learned that to get public attention, you need that one identity, that one figure to concentrate attention on. The whole group thing didn’t seem to be working, so I told them, what we have is good, the theatrical approach—so let’s keep it, and let’s take Alice and put him out front. The press and the music business will accept us more readily if we go with one front man.”

“Did it have to be Alice?” I asked.

“Not really,” Shep said. “Alice had just started to use the device of calling himself Alice, and so it was natural to use him as the front man to get the attention. But it could have been Mike, or one of the others. Our concern was more that we move one man out front, rather than who that man would be.”

I asked Shep why, if he hated the road so much, he continued to go out on the tours at all.

“There are too many things that have to be checked, and I want to be there to see it’s done right,” he said. “Our basic concert contract calls for us to get sixty percent of the gross. But there are all kinds of ways the local people can cheat you. I know them all. They can tell you how many seats are in their hall, and then put in extra rows and keep all of the ticket money from those extra rows for themselves. They can use phony tickets. They can have their ticket takers palm the tickets, and then tell us the tickets were never sold. If you read our contracts carefully, you’ll see that we require a sample ticket and a notarized, signed statement from the printer of the tickets listing the exact number of tickets printed at each price, from each promoter—six weeks in advance of the show. We require all unsold tickets to be

physically on hand, at the site of the concert for us to count and verify. We insist that we be paid for any difference between the number of unsold tickets we actually see and the number of tickets on the notarized manifest. We insist on the right to enter the box office and check the promoter's records. We have specific rules for what the tickets must look like. We insist that the tickets be ripped in half by a ticket taker, and that they be dropped into a locked box. We insist that a clicker-turnstile be installed at the door, so we get a count of how many people have come in. We insist that all tickets be printed by a bonded printing house.

"All of these things help to make sure that we don't get cheated. But in the end, the only real guarantee comes from being there, and knowing what to look for. We check the promoters we know and like just as thoroughly as one who we've never done a concert for before. I can look at a house and tell you within two hundred how many people are there. Libert's a little better than me at it; he can tell you within one hundred. When we're both at a gig, we're not going to get cheated."

I saved for last the obvious question: the moral aspects of the Alice Cooper show. I told him that, now that I was a traveling member of the troupe, I was tending to fall into the easy frame of mind that coolly accepted the logistical realities of the tour and ignored the basic attraction of the show—namely, the sexual titillation and bloody violence underlying every moment on stage.

I asked him how, from the beginning, he had rationalized this.

"Look, theater is emotion," Shep said. "But until we came along that emotion had been missing from rock and roll. There was never laughter, never fear, never disgust. Now we're bringing that whole theatrical concept to our

audiences. We're bringing theater to kids who have never seen theater. And we're featuring the three most commercial aspects of theater—sex, death, and violence."

"Okay," I said, "but is it right to offer those three elements to a fourteen-year-old kid?"

"I don't think there is a difference between a fourteen-year-old girl and a thirty-five-year-old man," Gordon said. "I have never felt that anything we did was morally wrong. In cities where they tell us that we can't use the snake or throw things into the audience—now that I consider morally wrong. Kids today are a lot different from what they used to be. A lot of the appeal of rock and roll is still that it's what parents don't like. These are high-energy times. Kids are physically turned on earlier now, and rock and roll is directed right at their groins. When I was fourteen, I didn't even know I had a cock.

"I don't see the difference between Alice chopping up a baby doll and Bela Lugosi sucking on someone's throat. That's in a moral sense. But I do know that you have to be more careful with Alice, because rock and roll is a strong medium, and Alice is very capable of playing with people's emotions. He has the capability of driving a crowd to frenzy, there is always the very real chance that it will happen, and so we have to be careful."

I told Shep that yes, I had heard all of that before—the idea of the Cooper show as rock and roll theater. But I asked him, just for a moment, to put himself in the place of a parent who might be scared that his child was falling in love with Alice Cooper, scared that his young teenager was becoming so obviously aroused by on-stage bloodlust and death. And I asked Shep what he would do if, at some time in the future, he was a parent, and his young child became entranced with an even more violent rock and roll concept—say, a group

that really did take small, living animals, and kill them on stage?

“If I had a child who was turned on by seeing actual, non-simulated death, then I’d sit him down and talk to him,” Shep said. “I wouldn’t be scared about it. I would try to tell him what life means, what life is worth. I think that would do it.”

We were eating cold cuts and potato salad in the dressing room of the arena, just before we were due to go on stage in Madison. Norm Klein sat down next to me, and said, “I’m worried about Alice. I think he’s really sick. He’s not drinking, he doesn’t want to play cards, nothing.”

I looked over in the corner. There, sitting by himself on a folding chair, Alice looked as if he were about to vomit. From the main room of the hall, we could hear “Alvin’s Christmas” and “The Little Drummer Boy” playing, part of the preshow tape that Artie King put on the loudspeaker system every night while the roadies made the final adjustments on our stage. I moved over by Alice. “It’s my stomach,” he said. “It got bad just a few hours ago. I don’t even think I can stand up, I feel so bad.”

Mike Bruce came in from the tuning room. He saw Alice siting with his head in his hands, and said, “What’s wrong?” Norm told him. Mike walked over, slapped Alice on the shoulder, and said, “Ah, the little baby.” But Alice did not respond, and Mike’s expression changed from a smile to one of concern.

Outside, fourteen thousand people were chanting for the show to start, expecting Alice to bound on stage and meet all of their visions of him as a combination of Charles Manson and Satan. Alice lowered his head to his knees, and closed his eyes.

Bob Brown, the group's young public relations man, brought Alice a paper cup of ice water, but Alice did not touch it. I asked Brown if he thought the show would take place. He said, "This is the worst I've ever seen him. He says he'll go on. But the bad thing is, this is the first of six one-nighters in a row."

Shep had already caught his flight to Chicago. Libert was out on the stage, giving instructions to the security guards who would stand inside the barricade between the crowd and the performers. So the man in charge in the dressing room was Mike Roswell, Shep's wiry, frizzy-haired assistant, who was himself trying to beat a 103-degree temperature. Roswell had been sick in bed the day before, back in New York, when he had heard that a series of rainstorms in the area had caused flooding in Greenwich, Connecticut. He had gotten out of bed and gone to Greenwich, to Neal Smith's house. "I wanted to try to save Neal's Rolls-Royce," Roswell said. He had moved the automobile to higher ground, but in the process had gotten sicker. Tonight Roswell talked with Alice, telling him to try to do the best that he could, that the band and the other performers would do everything possible to make the show go easily and well. Alice, open-mouthed and perspiring, just sat and listened. Libert came in to tell us that it was time, and we all walked quickly to the stage.

The musicians took their positions. The Amazing Randi and I walked to our side of the stage, and sat down to watch. Out in the audience, I saw young teenagers with their faces painted purple and green, ready to witness their idol in action. They would not be interested in a medical report on Alice. They had waited months for this, and they were jumping and waving their arms and demanding to be entertained.

Libert made the introduction, and “Hello! Hooray!” began. Alice stumbled out through the stage smoke like a crazed mass murderer, sneering and gesturing wildly to the audience. All the signs of illness were gone; he was at his best. He pranced around the stage, playing to the front rows. He was all facial twists and non-stop motion. He was giving his best performance of the tour so far, and the audience was loving it.

The band was working, hard. They knew that Alice was sick, so they joined in to take some of the burden off him. They leaped and stomped around the stage, running toward Alice, stopping just short of smashing him with their guitars. It gave the stage show additional visual impact, and it allowed Alice to relax just a bit, and to let the others carry some of the load. Norm crouched at the front of the stage, ready to pick Alice up and carry him off should he collapse; but Alice seemed to get stronger as the performance progressed. He sensed that the band was thinking about him and trying to help him, and it brought his spirits up. “They’re my boys!” he shouted after “Hard Hearted Alice” was finished. “Don’t they play good!”

The enthusiasm and effort to pull the performance off was catching. The Amazing Randi, after lifting the fake Alice head out of the guillotine basket, waved it toward the front rows and shouted, “It’s about time!”, causing one girl to collapse at the sight of what she thought was the one occasion when the guillotine had broken. Neal Smith kicked and smashed at his drums, and threw stick after stick into the audience. Only Glen Buxton seemed to be unaware of the intense, united feeling of this particular show. After the costume changes before “Sick Things,” when all the other musicians had returned to their places and had begun to play the song, Glen had yet to appear. Forty-five seconds into the song he walked out from the on-stage dressing

room, smiling casually and trying to light his cigarette before picking up his guitar.

As I was changing into my costume, Neal Smith stuck his head into the dressing room. The band had come backstage for the short pause before “Working Up a Sweat,” and Neal said, “Let’s try to get a rise out of Alice before we leave the stage. See what you can do.” So after I had put on the clothes and the beard and the hat, I slipped on a pair of silver Alabama sheriff’s sunglasses that I had found lying around, and added it to the Santa Claus getup. When the time came for me to go on, I walked out waving and tossing tee shirts to the crowd. When I walked up the stairs to meet the band, Alice saw me and said, “God, that’s *awful*” and broke up. He almost forgot to deck me, and after he finally did, and the band carried me off stage, we all ran to the dressing room with our arms around each other, feeling fine that what had promised to be a disaster had turned into the best show of the tour. We were convinced that we had just been part of a historic demonstration of raw courage, that Alice’s ability to go on with his act had been as dramatic as FDR hobbling up to the speaker’s podium under his own power. It was a classic example of the myopia that came with being a part of the traveling party. We were all so close to the situation that we were not even thinking about the reality of what had happened, which is that a caculatedly gory and morbid rock and roll show had been carried through to its expected conclusion.

In the dressing room, Neal Smith and I were taking a few postshow hits of vodka from the bottle he had brought with him from the hotel. Alice sat down to join us, and called for Norm to pour him a V.O. and Coke.

“Nice show,” I said. “Are you feeling better?”

“I’m fine,” Alice said. “It’s all psychosomatic. I just don’t want to do this show any more. I just want to do something new.”

ELEVEN

The temperature was close to zero as we prepared to leave Madison for the flight to Ann Arbor. When we arrived at the airport, we found that the engines on the Starship had not been started, and when we got inside the plane, we learned that there was no heat. We kept on our overcoats, and covered ourselves with blankets, and as we talked to one another on the couches and lounge chairs, our breath was visible in the air. “One of the jet valves is frozen up,” said Susan, the stewardess. “It’s too cold for us to take off yet. Everything’s frozen tight. It’s the first time the plane has been in cold weather.”

Outside, the pilots and mechanics were moving around on the runway, trying to figure out a way to get the plane heated up, and put us on our way to the next show. Because we were now into a string of one-nighters, there was no room for delay. A few of the roadies had ridden to Michigan overnight with the two truck drivers, but most of them were on the plane with us, and were needed to get the stage constructed by show time. Artie King moved through the club room of the plane, drinking a glass of orange juice. In addition to being the tour sound man, he was responsible for all of the baggage for the traveling party, and he had arrived at the airport early with our suitcases. “I almost hit that fucking pilot,” he said. “Our name *still* isn’t painted on the plane! I asked him why not, and he said it was too cold to paint the plane. Too cold!”

Someone put *The Maltese Falcon* on the TV sets. The Amazing Randi was talking a great deal, which was not uncommon. Randi was something of a tour mascot. He was the oldest man in the traveling party, a professional magician who had been hired to construct the stage props, and who had stayed on as the executioner and dentist in the

show. His real name was James Randi, but he much preferred his stage name, and everyone called him either “Amazing” or plain “Randi.” He was a gabber; he would never hesitate to fill the air with words, and he talked in a loud, gossipy, theatrical voice that could be both grating and hypnotic at the same time. Randi loved attention, and he had no apparent inhibitions. If there was a quiet moment, Randi would go into a quick buck-and-wing or, failing that, simply flutter his hands in front of him until someone noticed. He was vain and protective about his importance to the show. Shep insisted that Randi wear a black executioner’s hood during the beheading of Alice, but whenever he could get away with it, he would “forget” to put on the hood, so that he could let the audience see his facial expressions. When I had gone to New York for rehearsals, Randi had been very upset that the part of Santa Claus had been added to the show and he had not been given first crack at it. He had begun to complain loudly about it, and then to openly criticize my stage techniques in rehearsal, telling everyone who would listen to him that I was no actor, and that if they *really* wanted a Santa Claus who the audience would *believe* was Santa Claus, then they would get rid of me and let him take on the additional role. To calm him down, Shep had finally had to take Randi aside and explain to him why I was joining the show.

The band accepted Randi as a funny eccentric, a perfect fillip for the strange Cooper traveling party. Randi was never depressed or down; he might whine and bitch about something, but he was always on, always ready to entertain the tour people with his non-stop chattering and leprechaunish ways. Randi, in turn, loved “the fellows”; his chance to tour with them was winning him new fame in magicians’ circles, and opportunities to appear on the network talk shows as “the forty-four-year-old magician who performs in the Alice Cooper Show.” Today, Randi’s lecture

topic was the small town in New Jersey where he lived, and how the local police were stopping the cars of young people and making random searches for drugs. It was horrible, Randi said, and something must be done about it. He had contacted his old friend Chris Borgen of WCBS-TV in New York, and Chris was thinking about doing a story on it. But meanwhile the kids were being harassed, and Randi was leading a local drive to make the police see the light. He went on and on, telling stories of stops-and-searches in great detail, trying to get Alice's sense of moral outrage worked up. But Alice was hardly a rock star of the revolution; he sat on the Starship couch, wearing a black leather trench coat and a big fedora pulled down hard on his forehead, and tried to hear what Humphrey Bogart was saying. Randi did not let up, and at one point he asked Alice what he would do about the marauding police.

Alice shrugged. "I'd probably just not go there," he said, and turned his attention back to Sam Spade.

We were on the ground for more than an hour. Larry Hitchcock was more concerned than anyone else, and he kept stealing glances at his watch. More than once he went around to his road crew and said, "No fucking around, guys, when we get there, we're going straight to the hall. There's no time to go to the motel first."

The flight itself was a short one. We landed at Metro Airport in Detroit, and moved swiftly into the limousines. Just as we were about to leave for the motel, Norm Klein came back to the limousine in which Dennis Dunaway, Cindy Smith, David Libert, and I were riding, and said "David, there's not room in that first car for Alice"—meaning that someone was sitting on a jump seat in the limousine, making Alice fold his legs up instead of extending them full length. "It's Randi's fault," Cindy Smith said. "He's supposed to ride in the bus." The

Amazing Randi got out of the first limousine and began to walk toward our car, and Cindy called to him, “Hey, Randi, you’re supposed to ride in the bus. You always take Dennis and my seats.” Randi flung his arms into the air, made a few Jackie Gleason motions, clicked his heels, and danced over to the chartered bus.

Of all the travelers in the tour party, the person I was beginning to respect the most was Rebecca Segal, David Libert’s assistant. She also acted as tour secretary and official bookkeeper. There were other women on the road with us—Neal’s wife, Babette, was a regular traveler, Cindy Smith played the dancing tooth and lived with Dennis, Alice or Glen’s steady girlfriends would show up for a day or two, Mike Bruce would usually have someone, a couple of the girls who knocked on doors in some midnight motel or other would get lucky and turn up in the limousines or on the plane the next day—but Rebecca was the only one who was a legitimate, all-day, depended-upon worker.

All the annoying details that went along with life on the road fell to Rebecca. She was the one who kept in thrice-daily phone contact with the motels for the next several stops, so that everything would be perfect when we arrived. She was the one who made sure that the costumes were hanging in the on-stage dressing room at the right time for every change every night, and who made sure that they were safely picked up from wherever we tossed them after the show, so that they would make it to the next city. She was the one who served as liaison between the tour and the Starship crew, so that the plane was hopefully ready when we were. She was the one who coddled the motel desk clerks and managers, so that they smilingly came through with flawless service in response to our muttered demands from the phones in our rooms. She was the one who sorted out the hundreds of phone messages for Gordon and Libert each

day, and who handled the great majority of those requests and inquiries herself, to save Shep and David the bother. She was the one who called the doctors, sent out the laundry, made up the room lists, did the one-hour calls, checked over the motel bills, kept the precise ledgers, ran the errands, delivered the stray bags, distributed the backstage passes.

At the tour's outset, her presence was smiled at. Libert would tell the same story repeatedly: "I had to argue and argue with Shep to get a bookkeeper to help me on the road. So finally he says yes. And then we're going over the first set of ledgers, and he says, 'What's this, fifty dollars a week for a dogwatcher?' And I tell him, I had to hire someone to go around and feed and check on the group's dogs while we're on the road. So Shep starts pulling on his ear, and he says, 'So I have to pay someone a hundred and twenty-five dollars a week to write down on a ledger that I'm paying fifty dollars a week to have someone else feed a dog.'"

It was especially difficult for Rebecca to become an accepted member of the tour party because of the traveling troupe's standard definition of a female as a young, glitter-covered humanoid who would be waiting in the motel lobby when you returned from the show at night for the purpose of coming into your room, saying a few ignorant sentences, and then fucking you until you were ready to go to sleep. It didn't help matters for Rebecca that, in the past, female tour helpers had frequently become the willing sexual partners for anyone on the tour who felt the need on a given night. Rebecca was extremely pretty, and she happened to possess an eye-catching, buxom figure. Because of this, her arrival on the plane, or in a hotel lobby, was inevitably greeted with cries of "There they are—Rebecca!", or "Seen your toes lately, Rebecca?" from one or another of the wits in the band.

This attitude began to diminish soon enough, as the tour party started to sense just how competent she was, how necessary for the smooth functioning of the tour. Walk into a hotel lobby, there was Rebecca, instructing the clerks on the way to handle the telephone calls, how to bill the room-service charges. Walk into the arena, there, among the fragile, sequined, fastidiously assembled backstage ladies, was Rebecca, lugging an equipment case or a costume trunk. The transition in the tour party's feelings for Rebecca was helped along by her own attitude—which implied that she understood we were all very funny, very cool, very hip young men of the world, and that she also understood she was just a wee bit funnier, cooler, hippier, worldlier. But we were not to let it bother us—she liked us a lot, anyway; she thought we were all very amusing and fine, some day she would remember us with affection, and she was only too happy to be one of the boys for this tour. Before long, almost every member of the tour party was treating Rebecca with all the deference they would extend to their own mothers, with the twist that their mothers had somehow become sharper and smarter than they were themselves. Rebecca was twenty-two years old.

While the rest of us whiled the time away drinking room service liquor, or watching daytime TV, or partying after the shows in suites whose owners we did not know but whose numbers had been passed on to us in the dressing rooms just after the concerts, Rebecca worked. When it seemed that she had done everything there was that possibly could be done, she thought up something else. I began to drop in on her to keep her company, and when I came to her room in Ann Arbor, she was completing the typing of a letter. No one had told her to do it, and Gordon or Libert would never know that she had even written it, but she had thought that it might be a good idea, just to make sure there were no

screwups in the days ahead. Copies of the letter would be sent to the managers of every hotel on the remainder of the tour:

Once again, this letter is in reference to our reservations made by Beagle Travel in New York, and once again there are changes...

We have recently made a few personnel changes which alters the status of several rooms on the listing. I wrote you previously about a few of these changes but we have added a few since then. Please note the attached listing as correct, and assign rooms as noted. I am quite sure that there will be no further changes and that this should settle this.

In our dealings thus far with hotels we have found that the following is helpful both to our group and your employees:

1. Please be sure that the two (2) bedroom suite assigned to Alice Cooper and Norm Klein is registered to Norm Klein only. Advise your switchboard that this suite will receive no local calls at all. Long distance calls should be screened in the following manner: find out who is calling, put on hold, ring the suite and let them decide to take the call or not.

2. All rooms must be pre-registered before our arrival. When we get to the hotel there should be an envelope for each person on our list with a key to his room, and a room list with all Alice Cooper room numbers and names listed. I have enclosed a copy of our list which you may fill out and use. It is extremely important that we be pre-registered and have the room lists upon arrival.

3. Even though we are paying for all the rooms on our American Express Card, each person on our list must have a separate folio listing name, room number, room charge, tax,

phone calls, restaurant charges, etc. A copy of each folio will be required when checking out.

4. All rooms must have double beds except where noted as king size beds.

5. Please try to have luggage racks ready upon our arrival. We have a truck full of bags, etc. and it's a tremendous help if this is ready for us on arrival with a few porters to help. We have a person who will work with your people in getting the luggage to the proper rooms.

6. Naturally we would like as many of the rooms in the same area or if possible on the same floor. I realize that this is very difficult in some cases but whatever can be done to arrange this would be a great help.

A lot of this information is repetitious of Donna Dobbs' letter in November, but we have run into a few problems and I would like to eliminate the possibilities now. If you have any questions or if there are any problems that might arise from any of our requests please get in touch with Donna at Beagle Travel and she will contact us on the road.

I will still be calling you a day or so in advance of our arrival to verify some things. Thank you so much for your attention to our needs and we look forward to a lovely stay.

Best,
Rebecca Segal

Rebecca finished writing the letter, and we began to talk about the tour. I asked her if the treatment she was still getting from some of the Cooper travelers bothered her.

"I think it's going pretty well now," she said. "Oh, it'd be nice if they'd cut out the tits and ass stuff. I'm not offended by that, but I've been putting up with it since I was thirteen

years old, and it gets a little boring. I can tell that that's where it will stay with some of them. Glen won't get past that level. I guess males have a tendency to get conditioned that way, and a lot of them stay little boys forever because of it.

"I didn't know any of these people before the tour was ready to start, and you've got to kind of let them know where you are. Libert knows by now that I'm along to work, I'm not going to be sleeping with him, and I think the rest of them are beginning to understand too. It's not going to be a problem, I don't think."

She told me that she had left home at fifteen, and that she had been on her own from that time on. Her one professional interest was the theater. She had been an actress for a while, she had run a club in Montreal, and she had worked in the business office of a theater in Manhattan. She wanted to get into theatrical or musical management on a big-time basis, and when a friend had told her about the opening on the Cooper tour, her instincts had been to say yes. It was big, there was no question about that; and she figured that it would be a way for her to learn about running a major-scale touring company under on-the-road pressure. Her previous jobs seemed to have been with more traditional forms of entertainment, and I asked her how she was reacting to the Alice Cooper show.

"I'd never heard them play before those rehearsals at the Fillmore," she said. "I could do without the baby dolls dying, and without the blood. But it's fun. It's a damned good show, and it really is fun! When I was working in theater in New York, I could really give a shit if Totie Fields had another violin in the orchestra. I'd sit there all day and discuss that. I prefer this, by a lot. I like the people, and I enjoy seeing the show every night."

We discussed some of the tour people, and the talk, as it always did, got around to Glen Buxton, the distance between him and the rest of the band. Rebecca shook her head.

“On the day before the tour began, right before we were due to fly from New York to Nashville, Libert and I went to Glen’s hotel,” she said. “David had insisted that Glen stay in Manhattan the night before, instead of at his home in Connecticut, because he’d have no chance of making the flight if he was alone in Connecticut. So we went up to his hotel room to help him pack. And a couple days before, Glen had gotten this birthday card from his grandmother. It was very sweet, you know, the kind of card that grandmothers like to send. He saw me looking at it, so he took it and ripped it up into little pieces, and then he laughed. I told him, ‘Why did you do that? That was a very nice card. Your grandmother loves you, and she was being sweet and nice.’ Glen said, ‘Yeah, you’re right,’ and he started talking about writing her a letter and thanking her. It was that easy to turn him around. But then, five minutes later, he was saying, ‘Ah, fuck her.’

“Glen’s just so messed up. I feel so sorry for him. I keep asking myself, why is he like he is? He’s twenty-six years old, and he’s been an alcoholic, and he’s in worse trouble now, whether he thinks so or not. He’s so frightened. Maybe it’s because he knows how the group feels about him. Of the five of them, Coop is the only one who can see ten years ahead, who has any kind of vision at all. The others, they can’t even imagine what their lives will be when they’re thirty-five. But Glen? I don’t really think that he’ll be alive at thirty-five.”

I asked Rebecca about Alice, about how she was feeling about him.

“I’ll tell you, I’m in that dressing room on stage every night, when they change their costumes,” she said. “And a couple of times, the others all get their clothes on, and they go out and start to play, and Alice has to wait a few minutes before he goes out. So it’s just him and me in the dressing room, and I leave, I walk out, because it’s so depressing. He just sits in there, and he looks so *down*, so *sad*, he doesn’t want to be doing this, and he’s trapped. He has to be this ‘Alice’ thing that he’s created, and he doesn’t want it, but there’s no way out.

“The first night I met him was at rehearsal at the Fillmore, and after practice, he asked me what he should call me. He said, ‘Rebecca’s too long, that’s three syllables, how about if I call you Becky instead?’ And I said no, I don’t like the name Becky. So he said, ‘What about Becca?’ and I said that was okay, some people call me that. I said that some people call me Reb, too, and he said, ‘Yeah, I like that. I’ll call you Reb. And you can call me Coop.’ I said that was fine, and that I was glad he’d said it, because somehow I couldn’t imagine calling him Alice. He said, ‘Why?’ And I said I didn’t know, it just didn’t seem to me that he was someone called Alice, I thought I would be very uncomfortable calling him that. And he said, ‘Good. Call me Coop. I’m getting so tired of being Alice.’”

Rebecca paused. “I don’t know,” she said. “When I hear all of those people screaming for him to come back on stage every night, and then I see him sitting there in the dressing room, wearing that ridiculous costume and not wanting to go out there again at all, I just can’t stay around. I don’t enjoy seeing that.”

Still, on measure, such flashes of moroseness from Alice as Rebecca had noticed were the exception. They were noticeable mainly because they contrasted so sharply with

his standard persona—the joking, jabbering, laughing, wisecracking kid who doesn't want to think about growing up, who would rather stay a punk for the rest of his life, if he had the choice. That was the Alice that remained visible most of the time—and since he was the star, that was the tone the tour took on most of the time. It was light, and it was easy, and there was a new charge of real, tingling excitement every night, as we would pull into the bowels of yet another giant arena, and feel the noise of fifteen thousand more people howling for us, waiting for the show, not knowing that we were still inside the limousines—but on their feet and stamping, keyed up, ready. Every time we drove in, and I heard and felt that sound hit me, my heart raced, and I knew that no matter how many cities we flew into, as long as there was this reaction every night, it could never become ordinary.

When we got to the University of Michigan Field House, the sound hit me especially hard, and I decided to go on stage right away, rather than head for the dressing room and the preshow food and drink. I climbed up and watched the roadies at work. ZZ Top, the band that was opening the show for us every night, had been finished for perhaps five minutes, and the crowd was frantic for the Cooper show to begin. I looked out over the colorful jumble of the thousands of bodies. Standing next to me on stage was Nicky Brazell, our second truck driver. Nicky was in his twenties, a Teamster from California, and this was his first rock and roll tour. He had the look of a young steelworker, and the people in the first few rows must have been wondering what this hardhat was doing on the set of their man Alice's show.

Larry Hitchcock came up to Nicky, and said, "Here. Take one of these." He offered Nicky some earplugs.

"Naw," Nicky said. "Forget it."

“You’d better use them,” Hitch said. “Everyone else does. It can save you a lot of pain.”

“Don’t want ’em,” Nicky said. “I’m no pussy.”

Hitchcock smiled, threw his hands up, and walked away. Nicky and I kept looking over the crowd, and we talked above the sound of the preshow Christmas carol tape.

“You know, this is amazing,” Nicky said. “The first day or two of this, I just wanted to quit. I showed up at rehearsal in New York, and I didn’t know anyone, and no one talked to me, and I said screw this. I was driving all night to Nashville, and I thought about my family, and how much I missed them. I knew I wasn’t going to be home for the holidays, and I thought, for this? I’m going to be away from my family at Christmas for *this*? I even called my wife about it, I told her I was thinking about quitting. But she said I’d made a commitment. She said I’d made a commitment to the band, to do the driving, and to her, to make the money I’m making on the tour. She said I owed it to everyone concerned to keep on driving.

“I talked to some of the guys on the road crew about it. They told me that everyone goes through it, for a couple of days, before they get to feel that they’re a part of it. They told me that everyone gets lonely when they feel they’re an outsider. Now I’ve gotten to know them. And these are the nicest people I’ve ever worked with in my life. Hearts as big as this, and strong, too.

“I’m just supposed to drive the truck and call it a day. But when I got here this morning, I saw that they were late, and they were going to need help, so I unloaded with them. And tonight I’ll stand at the back or the side of the stage, and help with security. It’s a team. I love these people. This is the first time in my life I ever felt this way about a job.

“You know, I’m not the kind of guy to get shaky knees. But sometimes, in the middle of the night, while I’m driving to the next town, I get a chill thinking of all the people who are depending on me to get there with the equipment. I get scared, just thinking of what it would mean if I didn’t get to the next city on time.”

I left Nicky on the stage, and walked back to the dressing room. It was another athletic team locker room—apparently the University of Michigan basketball team used it on game nights. Alice and Neal were off in a trainer’s room, sitting on an examining table, playing cards, and I went in to join them.

After a few minutes, two young reporters from the *Jackson Citizen-Patriot* opened the door and came in. Normally, Alice was a media junkie, he would gladly go through the routine questions and answers for any local press. But tonight—perhaps as an extension of the periods of unhappiness he was feeling on the road—he was rude. I had never seen him this way, and I could tell that he was putting the two young writers in a state of high anxiety.

“What are you playing, blackjack?” said the reporter who was to ask all the questions.

Alice fanned his cards, did not look at the young men. “Crazy eights,” he said. “Ochos.”

“Ochos?” the reporter said. “Is that what they call it in Phoenix?”

“*Phoenix*?” Alice said, still looking at the cards. “I wouldn’t know. I haven’t been there in so long.

“I heard Salvador Dali was doing a sculpture of you,” the reporter said.

“It’s already been done,” Alice said.

“But how did you get together?” the reporter said. “Did he know you had the same approach to art, or…”

Alice sighed. “Yes, he’s interested in surrealism and that’s what we’ve always been interested in.”

“How did you think up the idea of using so much makeup?” the reporter asked.

“That’s been written about a million times,” Alice said.

“But I was curious…” the reporter said.

“I don’t want to talk about something that’s been written about a million times before,” Alice said. “That’s just boring, you know?”

Bob Brown, the tour publicist, came into the training room, and Alice gave him a look that said, get these guys out. Neal Smith, welcoming the opportunity to get some ink for himself, was talking politely to the two reporters: “You get that rush when you climb up on the stage, which is nice; adrenaline, it’s still legal, they haven’t outlawed that yet…”

But Bob Brown cut him off. “Okay, fellows,” he said. “We’ve got to get ready for the show. You’ll have to clear out.” Which they did, after showering Alice with thanks for his time.

After they had closed the door behind them, Alice said to me, “That’s what I hate, questions like that. Don’t you see how I would get to hate that?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “They were nervous. They were scared to meet you. You can hardly blame them.”

“At least if someone says, ‘When was the last time you farted in church,’ I know he has an original thought,” Alice said. “When I hear the same questions I’ve been hearing for years, I just don’t want to answer any more.”

Norm Klein came in to mix Alice a V.O. and Coke, and before he started pouring, Alice said, “Is that a fresh bottle of V.O.? Are you sure that it was sealed?” Alice insisted on sealed bottles, in case someone was trying to poison him through his drinks. Norm said that he had just opened the seal himself.

I walked back out into the arena. There were lines of security guards blocking the areas between the sides of the stage structure and the side walls of the arena. At the left side, I saw a middle-aged man with a businessman’s haircut talking rapidly at the guards. The man looked quite out of place at the concert, and the guards were doing their best to ignore him. I walked over to see what was up.

I asked a guard. “Oh, this man says he’s Alice Cooper’s uncle,” the guard said. “But we have orders not to let anybody back here except the ones with these backstage passes on their shirts.”

The man saw me, and reached over the guards and handed me something. I looked at it. It was a Michigan driver’s license, and on it was embossed the name “Vincent Collier Fumier.” Just like Alice’s. “I’m Alice’s uncle, from Detroit,” the man called to me. “Won’t you let me see him?”

“Let him come with me,” I said. The guards let the man through. I started walking him back toward the dressing room. The Detroit-Ann Arbor area was one of the places the band used to live in the years before they made it big, so the backstage hallways were crammed with local freaks who used to know them, or at least said that they did. The

backstage crowd looked at the man with me as if he were an orangutan.

“They sure have a lot of security around Alice now,” the man said.

I led him into the dressing room. There, sitting among the other Billion Dollar Babies, Alice sipped his fresh drink.

“That’s him all right,” the man said to me.

Alice looked up. “Hey!” he said. “There he is! Uncle Vince!”

“I won’t take too much of your time,” the man said to him. “I know how busy you are. I just wanted to come back and thank you. For what you sent us, and for everything you’ve done for us...”

“Everything okay, then?” Alice said.

“That’s right,” the man said. “I don’t get to see you very often, and I just wanted to say thanks to you in person.”

Alice, his face and mouth painted for the show, accepted the quiet, awkward expression of gratitude with an embarrassed nod. The man shook hands with the rest of the band, and then went back out to his seat, to watch his nephew work.

After the concert, a wild, stomping, good one, our limousines left the hall too early, and we got caught up in the regular traffic leaving the arena parking lot. I was riding with Libert, Neal and Babette Smith, Glen Buxton, and Glen’s girlfriend, Susie Aaron, who had flown in from New York.

While we idled in the traffic, Libert said, “Well, you guys got rich tonight. $48,263.60.”

“Good,” said Susie Aaron. “Then I can go back to Bloomingdale’s next week.”

Some high school kids, who were walking away from the Field House noticed our limousines. They ran toward us, then bent down and peered in the windows, thrilled at their discovery.

Babette looked out at them. “Oh, Neal,” she said. “I *hate* hippies. I don’t even know why you play for them.”

“Okay,” Neal said. “Why don’t we take one home and eat him?”

TWELVE

When it was over, there was nothing to say. No questions, really. Only the obvious, unanswered ones: Why had it taken this long to happen? Why had it never happened before?

The day started quietly enough. Toledo had not even been listed as a stop on our original itinerary; it had been added after the tour had started by Jon Podell, the New York booking agent who arranged the Cooper road schedule. We had an open date after Ann Arbor, Toledo was just down the road, and it seemed like an easy way to pick up some loose money. So Toledo was plugged into the Holiday Tour.

It was snowing when we left the motel in Ann Arbor. Since the trip to Toledo was too short to use the Starship, we were driving over. There were limousines and cars available, but just about everyone decided to take the chartered bus. Performers, roadies, and managers alike—we all felt like a 1940s Big Band, riding together over the barren landscape of northwestern Ohio.

Rebecca walked up and down the aisle of the bus, handing out financial ledgers to the officers of the corporation—i.e., Alice, Mike, Neal, Dennis, and Glen. Dennis broke out his cassette player, and we listened to old Beatles and Jefferson Airplane tapes as we rode.

The Cooper travelers were vastly amused at the quaintness of the Ohio countryside. We entered the outskirts of Toledo, a gray, industrial area, and passed some sprawling, low-slung factories with heavy smoke fouling the air. Susie Aaron, looked out at the bleak surroundings, and said, “Why are we going here? Where’s Jonny Podell?”

“Probably in Florida spending his cut of our tour money,” someone said from the back of the bus.

“We’ll have to wait until the end of the tour to crucify him, then,” Susie said.

“God, look out there,” Glen said. “Real Archie Bunker country.”

We drove into downtown Toledo. It was apparent that no one on the bus wanted to be here. “If the Lord ever wanted to give the world an enema, this is where He’d stick the goddamn nozzle,” David Libert said.

Artie King gazed at the slush-covered streets and sidewalks, and said, “Why don’t we cancel Toronto so we can hang out here for a few days?”

The bus driver could not find the downtown Holiday Inn. We rode up St. Clair Street, and Mick Mashbir gestured at a neon sign. “Check that out,” he said. “Toledo Academy of Beauty Culture.”

We passed a grimy flophouse. “Look at the sign on the bar window, Glen,” Dennis said. “‘Plate Lunches.’” On the street, three old men were heading for the bar, and they stopped to look at the bus full of Billion Dollar Babies grinning out at them.

After a few more wrong turns, we arrived at the Holiday Inn. We headed directly for our rooms: the weather was nasty, and no one was up for sightseeing in the Toledo business district. Everyone wanted only to kill the afternoon, get the show over with, and move on to Canada. No one guessed that this night was to be the one when the chickens came home to roost. That here, in the middle of the country, the Alice Cooper audience would let the band know that there is a price to be paid for building yourself into a vicious, demented legend. On this night, the Alice Cooper band

would find out that Starships and limousines and talk of golf matches with Bob Hope and Spiro Agnew were all very fine—but that somewhere, in one small pocket of America, the teenagers did not understand rock and roll put-ons, did not understand the theatrics of gore. In Toledo, the fans of Alice Cooper believed everything they had been told about the monstrous band that had come to their town—and on this night, we would all learn a lesson about exactly what that meant.

Our caravan was four cars long as we moved through the gathering snowstorm, and across the Cherry Street Bridge toward the Toledo Sports Arena. The arena was about a mile from our hotel. The night was blustery and wet. In addition to our usual two limousines and one station wagon, we were trailed by a car carrying relatives of Neal Smith, who lived in the Northern Ohio area and who were coming along to see the performance. There had been some confusion at the Holiday Inn, and the motorcade had started without an official go-ahead from Libert. But everyone was so anxious to get this show out of the way that we kept on driving, and assumed that everything at the hall would be ready when we arrived.

I was in a limousine with Alice, Neal, Norm Klein, and Bobby Dolin. Alice's girlfriend, Cindy, had joined the tour, but she had decided against coming to the show, and had stayed back at the hotel. Shep wasn't here, either; this was only an eight thousand-capacity house, and the next night we were due to perform in front of seventeen thousand in Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens, so he was up in Canada, making final arrangements there.

We turned into the Sports Arena parking lot. It was 8:20 p.m., and much of the audience was still arriving. The Sports Arena was an ugly, lumpy little cement barn, ancient and

dismal in comparison with the modem civic coliseums where we had been playing. From the outside, it looked like a crumbling boxing club. Our driver turned left once he got inside the parking lot.

“I don’t think this is right,” said Alice, in the back seat.

But it was too late. The other three cars in our group were following us. We drove on for perhaps thirty yards—and stopped.

When we got to the bank of the filthy Maumee River. We had turned wrong, and now we were at the dead-end of a single lane leading through the general parking area. Behind us, other incoming traffic had blocked us in.

“Eight twenty-three in Toledo, and right now, ZZ Top should be on stage over in the Sports Arena!” said the disk jockey’s voice on the car radio. “And then, of course, the concert everyone’s been waiting for—the big Alice Cooper Show!”

“Damn,” said the limousine driver. He climbed out, and began motioning for the cars behind us to back up. The horns started immediately; the drivers of the other cars were anxious to get some of the few remaining parking spaces, and did not want to move for our Cadillacs. So it took ten minutes before the four cars in our group had managed to back out, and to swing around toward the stage door, at the rear of the arena.

But when we got there, we found that the pathway to the stage entrance was blocked by still more parked cars. We were a good fifty yards away. David Libert came running up from the second limousine, and pounded on our driver’s window.

"*Never* leave the hotel until I tell you!" Libert said. "Do you understand that? Never! Turn around and go back to the hotel again, and you stay there until I tell you!"

"That's stupid," Alice said. "Why should we go back to the hotel?"

"Because we're blocked here, we can't drive into the arena," Libert said.

"Fuck that," Neal Smith said. "I'm walking. My grandfather's in that other car. I'm just going to walk in."

The snow was turning Libert's hair white. He leaned down so that Neal could see him. "There's a couple hundred kids around the stage door," Libert said. "You'll never make it."

Alice pulled a hat down over the front of his face. "I'm not going back to the hotel," he said.

Libert curled his hands into fists.

"Alice, I think David is serious," Norm Klein said.

"I have high boots on," Neal said. "Get some cops to help us. We can walk in. The snow's not that high."

"It's all mud," Libert said.

Artie King, driving a brown station wagon, veered crazily around the back parking lot area, trying to find a break in the line of cars for us to squeeze through. But it was solid. There was going to be no way for us to drive any farther.

"Does anyone have a hard object?" Norm said. "I can break some of those car windows, and push those two cars over there out of the way. They're both older models, you can do that. Then we can drive on through."

“This is so stupid,” Alice said.

“Wait here,” Libert said. “Please. Nobody try walking until I get back.”

Five minutes passed. Libert returned. “All right,” he said. “I got the cops to clear the doorway. Everyone together now, let’s go. They’re going to tow some cars later, so the limos can get inside then. Right now we’re going to walk it.”

Alice and I began to walk through the mud, toward what we thought was the stage door. But we were going the wrong way, and within a minute we were alone, in the middle of a vast, dark clump of parked cars. We had lost the others. “Hold on,” Alice said. “I think we’re going toward the river again.” Even Norm Klein had managed to stray away from us. We got our bearings, headed for the arena once more, and walked together toward the stage door. The crowd had been dispersed, and we were by ourselves as we came into the arena.

There was no dressing room for us; only a curtained-off area with a dirty cement floor and a few tubs of iced drinks. This was perhaps thirty yards behind the stage, and it was unheated, so cold that no one bothered to remove their overcoats. ZZ Top was finishing up as Alice and I pushed the curtains aside to find the rest of the band muttering about the accommodations.

Alice was in a cheery mood, however. He sat down, broke out the playing cards, and began to look for a Crazy Eights partner. He found Tom Davies, a young reporter for the Toledo *Blade* who had come backstage with his wife, BettyJean. Alice offered Davies a beer, and started to throw one-liners his way. Davies smiled; he had lucked into an easy feature story, before the concert even started.

I walked out to examine the crowd. The moment I stepped onto the stage, I sensed that something was wrong. “Take a look at this,” said Mike Roswell, who was still on the tour in Shep’s absence. “It’s gonna be nasty tonight.”

The audience was unlike any other I had seen on the road. While in the other cities the fans had been exuberant and excited in the final minutes before we came on stage, tonight it was different. The Toledo crowd had the look of a reform school convention. These were tough kids, and there was not a glimmer of pleasantness or obvious intelligence in the faces I could see. On a normal night, as the roadies and managers and I would stand on the stage before the show, the people in the first few rows would smile and wave to us, perhaps toss a frisbee or ask for an autograph. Tonight, though, there were no smiles. Just sullen, hostile stares. No shouting; the hall was almost silent as the somber young faces, many of them open-mouthed and wide-eyed, glared at us. I felt a chill run through me, and I chided myself for being so silly. But I couldn’t help it. There was something here that vaguely reminded me of a horror movie, and I felt very shaky just standing on the stage.

The setup of the arena didn’t help any. Bob Bageris, the promoter of the show, had arranged for “festival seating”—a term that sounds joyous and lighthearted, but in fact stands for one of the cruelest, most depressing aspects of rock and roll. Festival seating means that there are no chairs at all on the floor level of the hall, and no reserved tickets. It is used in places where there is a relatively small audience capacity, and its purpose is to squeeze as much money out of the arena as possible. First come, first served is the rule, and the entire main floor of the arena is given over to people whose sole concern is to smash their way to the front of the hall. On a normal tour night, there was an ugly crush at the front, just in the small area between the first row of seats and the

barricades; with festival seating, this was multiplied by a thousand. On this night, the hall was dark and muggy, and there were random, bloody fist fights all along the first ten or twenty rows, as the strongest of the teenagers in the crowd mauled their way forward.

Norm Klein was pacing furiously. “That fucking Bageris!” he said. “There’s no security at all in this building! I’m going to have to earn my pay tonight, boy. Look over there.”

I glanced off the side of the stage. There, on the floor, screaming as if insane, a pimple-faced young man in his early twenties was gesturing wildly at two Toledo policemen. “Fucking pigs!” he said. “Fucking little pigs!” The young man appeared to be brain-damaged. He had long, greasy blond hair, and his eyes were absolutely dull. He was trying to get closer to the stage; our own roadies were clearly the people who were ordering that he be kept away, but he was turning on the policemen, bellowing at them, raising his fists and crying at them to dare to come near him.

Up higher to the side of the stage, where there were some permanent seats, I saw two boys position themselves so that they were exactly parallel to the places where the performers would stand. Both boys carried heavy poles, approximately the size and weight of baseball bats. They were within leaping distance of the stage, and there were no security men between them and us.

Even the groupies were different tonight. They seemed almost angry. The ones near the back of the stage neither flirted nor talked. They just walked up to some of our roadies, threw their arms around them, and began to kiss them—then just as suddenly broke off, turned their backs, and walked away.

I looked again toward the main audience. I saw a girl shouting at me; I was already wearing my earplugs, and I could not make out what she was saying. I pulled the plugs out. “A boy’s sick!” she cried. “Please get some help!” Perhaps five feet away from her, in the front row of the shoving crowd, a boy of about fourteen had passed out. He had slumped over the barricade, and now he was being crushed against it. I called Ronnie Volz over, and he went to the barricade area and told some University of Toledo football players, who had been recruited as front-of-the-stage guards, to save the boy. They grabbed him by his shoulders and pulled his unconscious body over the wall.

The lights went down. I looked toward the pimple-faced boy who had been screaming; he was now crouched on a railing, not ten feet from the stage, and he was focusing his eyes on Alice’s main microphone. A throaty rumble was coming up from the audience. This was not the look and sound of people ready to be entertained; this was the sodden, drugged feel of a mob primed for a fight. They were just... *waiting*. I felt scared all over again; I didn’t want to be here. I saw Bob Gruen, the photographer, who had joined the tour for a few days, and I motioned him over to my regular spot at stage left. I told him what I was feeling, and he nodded in agreement.

“I was walking around downtown this afternoon, and I got stopped by this Jesus freak,” Gruen said. “He saw the backstage passes on my case, and he asked me if I was traveling with Alice Cooper. When I said yes, he said, ‘Man, that’s the supreme evil.’ And I told him, ‘You think Alice is evil? Look in the faces of his audience sometime, if you want to see the supreme evil.’”

Gruen was interrupted by the announcement: “...the legendary... ALICE COOPER!!!”

Alice was not halfway to his microphone before it started to happen. A full can of beer came sailing out of the audience and smashed down by my feet, then bounced off the stage. A cigarette lighter skipped onto the metal table, right beside me. Alice walked into the spotlights, and before he could sing a word a raw egg, traveling fast, hit him hard in the chest. He jerked backward.

He began to sing “Hello! Hooray!” Before he could complete the first verse, another heavy, hard object came flying out of the darkness and hit him on the collarbone, causing him to grimace and drop his hand microphone.

The attack began to intensify. The stage felt like a free-fire zone. All around us, sharp, bulky missiles were crashing to the floor. They seemed to be coming from all directions. I looked up into the beams of the four Super Troupers. Outlined in the thin, bright tunnels of light were literally dozens of hard, swiftly moving projectiles, which disappeared in the blackness again, only to plummet down seconds later, somewhere on the stage. With each passing moment, the barrage increased. A rock slammed into my leg. A glass beer bottle shattered three feet away. I felt sick to my stomach. I looked to my right. Glen Buxton was holding his guitar in front of his face, trying to protect himself. I dropped to my knees and covered my head with my hands. I could hear myself breathing.

The band was trying to continue, but the crowd was roaring with excitement, and the assault was not letting up. It was so starkly obvious what was happening: here, in Toledo, Ohio, the story of Alice Cooper as a vicious killer had truly been bought. This was the Alice Cooper band up here, these were the baby-killers, the chicken-murderers, the ax-wielders. And now, full of a malevolent frenzy, the young Toledo audience was giving it all back.

Norm Klein was frantically pointing a flashlight into the audience, trying to get their attention, to make them stop. But there would be no stopping these people. Alice, his clothing stained and ripped, went into “Billion Dollar Babies,” trying his best to see the shrapnel before it hit him. He was struck again, in the chest. The worst thing about the attack was the anger with which the objects were being thrown. This was not a case of Beatle fans tossing jelly beans onto the stage. These were big, dangerous weapons, and they were being hurled through the darkness with all the thrust and potential harm of fastballs. They were meant to hit, perhaps to maim.

Alice was just finishing “Billion Dollar Babies” when the horrible moment came. I was still on my knees, trying to protect myself, when I saw it. I was trying to see the other side of the stage, the front row, where another boy had fainted and was being choked, his neck pinned against the barricades as the crowd charged from behind him. And then, on that side of the stage, there was a brief flash, and a terrible, sharp, high-volume explosion. In the shadows, the figure of a man crumpled to the stage floor.

I could not see who it was. He fell about five feet from Alice, and just lay there, still as death. Alice took one look, then ran swiftly to the back of the stage, and down the stairs. I followed him. The music stopped—not abruptly, but piece by piece, as each of the instrumentalists realized that a bomb of some sort had been thrown onto the stage. As I ran off, I could see the dark shapes of the roadies running to the fallen man’s side.

Alice was screaming at the bottom of the stairs: “Do you realize that someone has been blinded out there! Someone has lost his eyes!” He was such an odd sight, in his satin

sailor suit and streaked mascara, his face ashen with fright. He seemed to be on the verge of sobbing.

Dennis Dunaway was still on the stage, and he was addressing the audience through a microphone. The house lights remained down, and Dermis was in darkness as he said: “There’s a few children out there throwing things... I don’t know if you know it, but that blew up in someone’s *face*... if you keep throwing things, we won’t play... we all came here to have a *good time!*” I had never heard Dennis angry, but his voice was shaking as he spoke, and as the roadies worked to help the still-prone figure on the right side of the stage.

Neal Smith came running down the stairs, flushed in his rage: “It’s Hitch! It blew up in Larry Hitchcock’s face!”

We all moved back into the curtained-off dressing area. Norm Klein was keeping all non-performers away, so we were alone, and our voices echoed through the empty annex of the Sports Arena.

“Get the cars!” Alice gasped, frightened almost to the point of not being able to get the words out. “Where are the cars? I’m not playing out there!”

Mike Roswell grabbed him. “Wait, Alice,” he said. “Wait just a few minutes.”

“*Wait?*” Alice screamed. “*Wait?* Where are the cars, damn it? Who was it?”

“It was Hitch,” Roswell said. “He’s all right.”

“It’s all *right?*” Neal Smith shouted. “Don’t tell *us* it’s all right! We have to stand out there!”

“Neal. Relax,” Roswell said. “I said *Hitch* was all right. Alice asked me who it was, so I told him. Hitch is going to be all right. It wasn’t his eyes.”

“I ain’t playing for those fuckers,” Glen Buxton cried. “I ain’t going out there and being a target.”

Out in the arena, the lights were still off. The crowd was near bedlam, chanting for more, calling for the band to come back. I could hear them howling and stamping their feet.

“What the fuck is going on out there?” Neal shouted. “They’re trying to *kill* us!”

“We are *leaving!*” Alice bit off. “Where are the *cars?* Just get the cars. That’s the show, it’s *over*, let’s *go.*”

The Amazing Randi came strutting into the dressing area. “We ought to announce a hundred dollar reward for the name of the child who threw that explosive,” he said.

“*Reward?*” Neal bellowed. “We ought to *machine gun* the motherfucker!”

Larry Hitchcock pulled back the curtains and came in. “I’m okay, guys,” he said. “It was just the force of the explosion that stunned me. I would have lost my eardrums, but I was wearing the plugs. Don’t worry, no one’s hurt.”

David Libert and Mike Roswell conferred in a corner. They had a large problem: the band had completed only two songs, and without Shep here, it was going to be hard to make them go back on stage and finish the show. The rising sound of the crowd underlined the urgency of making a decision, fast.

“Let’s just wait until the audience cools off…” Roswell said.

“Mike, I’m *not* going out there,” Alice said. “I have to put my head out there and lock it in a *guillotine*, with the spotlights on me. When I’m in that thing, do you think I can get out if I see something coming at me?”

Libert looked at Alice. “We owe them a show,” he said.

“*Those* people?” Alice shouted. He was almost begging. “*Please*, David. Those people are crazy out there. We don’t owe them *anything*. Do you want me to stand up in the spotlights and get *killed?* David, there’s going to be a riot here in a couple of minutes. *Please*, get the cars and get us back to the hotel before it starts.”

“Punk town,” Neal said. “Punk, fucking town. We’re supposed to risk our lives for *those* fucking people?”

Mike Bruce came into the dressing area. “They must like me,” he said. “I’m the only one who didn’t get hit by anything.”

“Roswell, just tell me,” Alice said. “Are the cars in the building?”

Roswell nodded yes.

“Then we’re going,” Alice said. “If you want to talk any more, you can talk back at the hotel.” He led the way to the cars, and the rest of us went along. We piled into the limousines and the station wagon. Neal’s relatives ran after us, and got into their car.

Libert hurried up to us. “Alice!” he said.

Alice looked out of the Cadillac. “You know where Hitchcock got hit?” he said. “That’s where I was going to be next. That could have been me.”

“Libert, what are we waiting for?” Neal shouted. “Give them their fucking money back. There’s no way I’m going back on that stage.”

A Toledo policeman approached our car. “I don’t blame you,” he said to Alice. “I wouldn’t go out there, either.”

“Somebody’s got to draw the line,” Alice said.

“It’s never been like this before,” the policeman said. “They never acted like this to any other group.”

Libert got into the front seat, and we tore out of the Sports Arena. Almost all of the audience’s cars were still in the parking lot. The crowd was expecting us to come back on stage.

“I’m sorry, David,” Alice said. “I’ll talk to Shep for you, if you want. But I just can’t go out there again.” He was shivering as he talked.

The ride to the Holiday Inn was short. As we climbed out of the limousines at the back entrance, Libert said, “Driver, take me straight back to the hall.”

I walked inside. The desk clerk called, “Who’s Dave Libert? I have an emergency phone call for him.”

I ran back out, just as the limousine was pulling away. I banged on the hood, and Libert got out. He came inside and took the telephone. It was Shep. Roswell, still backstage, had reached him in Toronto, and he had called the hotel and waited for us to arrive.

“Shep, I know,” Libert said. “Alice says he won’t go on. What can I do? I can’t drag him onto the stage.”

The musicians were waiting for an elevator. Alice saw that Libert was talking to Gordon, and stayed downstairs. The others went up to their rooms. I watched with Alice.

Libert was on the phone for ten minutes. He did more listening than talking. Finally, Alice went over and took the phone from him. The receiver was on a long cord, which had been handed out to Libert over the front desk counter, so Alice, leaning on the counter in his sailor suit and makeup, looked as though he was waiting to register. Except for us, the lobby was empty. At the Sports Arena, the crowd was still waiting and chanting in darkness.

“But Shep...,” Alice said. “I’m afraid to go out there... they were throwing *bombs*...”

His voice was quieter, less excited than it had been at the arena. He, too, spent most of his time on the phone listening to Gordon’s arguments for the band to go back on stage.

“...I don’t know,” Alice said. “You didn’t see it, Shep. You don’t know how bad it was... Yes, I know I have a responsibility. I’m aware of that ...”

Libert walked over to me and handed me his copy of the room list. “Do me a favor,” he said. “Call every room. Tell them to come down to the lobby, with their instruments. We may be going back to the hall.”

I picked up a house phone and began to call the rooms. No one else seemed still as frightened as Alice.

“We’re going back, huh?” said Mick Mashbir, when I told him. “Should I bring my costume, I guess?”

“Huh?” said Mike Bruce, who was in his room with a girl who had been wtih him since the afternoon. “Okay. Fine. I’ll be right down.”

“Right,” said Dennis Dunaway. “In the lobby. I’ll tell Glen.”

“Okay, man,” said Neal Smith. “See you in a minute or two.”

Alice was still on the phone with Shep. He looked over at Libert, pleading in his eyes. Libert went to his side, and took the phone. He talked to Shep for a few more minutes, then hung up.

Libert came up to me again. “Call the rooms back,” he said. “Tell them to forget it. We’re not going back on. Shep’s not happy, but he’s going along with it. I’m getting that fucking money from the box office, though.

“And listen. This is the story we’re giving to the press: We’re saying that when the explosion happened, it shattered one of our stage lights, and Mike Bruce got some pieces of glass in his eye. We’re saying that he’s being rushed to a doctor in Detroit, his personal physician from when the band lived there. We’re saying that we don’t know the doctor’s name, so that they can’t check. Bob Brown and Roswell are at the hall now, telling that to the reporters. This way it’s a black and white thing, it looks like the band can’t continue without a guitarist. It sounds a lot better than just saying that Alice is too scared of the audience to go back on, you know? I’m going over there now. We’re going to tell the crowd the same story.”

I went up to Alice’s suite. There, four uniformed Toledo policemen were swapping stories with Alice, Norm, and Cindy Lang. Alice was in a dressing gown, explaining to the cops about life on the rock and roll road. The policemen, for their part, seemed to be getting on with Alice quite famously; whatever they had heard about him before, they were finding out now that he was funny and easy to shoot the breeze with, and not even a faggot. All four of the cops

kept sneaking looks at Cindy, in her see-through fishnet shirt, and with every gaze at her they developed new respect for Mr. Cooper. Before long they were all drinking Budweiser out of the can, and telling Alice about Toledo.

“Yeah, that Sports Arena is a weird place,” one of the policemen said. “One night, we had a guy naked in the middle of the main floor, masturbating! This twenty-one-year-old girl comes out to get us, she says, ‘Help! There’s a man playing with his dingdong!’ That’s what she called it—a dingdong! She’s twenty-one years old! Man, did I feel sorry for her date that night, whoever he was!”

“At least she didn’t call it a peepee,” Cindy Lang said.

“He’s playing with his ‘down there,’” Alice said, and the room filled with laughter. The cops had come to the suite to protect Alice in case of a mass charge on the Holiday Inn. But the hallways were empty. Even now, Libert was at the hall, having an announcer tell the crowd that Mike Bruce’s eye was injured, and that Alice Cooper would not be coming back on. The crowd would leave with moderate restraint, doing only modest damage to the arena, and Libert would get all of the money the group would have earned had they put on an entire show.

And if the Toledo teenagers did not realize that, while they waited in the still-dark Sports Arena for the Billion Dollar Babies to take the stage again, the famous Alice Cooper was chuckling and drinking beer at his hotel with four local patrolmen... well, maybe that was for the best. Alice seemed far more comfortable with the cops than he would have been with the kids, and that is not the kind of thing that the world’s most determinedly antisocial rock and roll band would likely want advertised.

The policemen stayed up with Alice most of the night. Gradually, Alice calmed down about what had happened. At first, he was full of rapid talk about his walkout at the arena. No matter what the subject, he would always return to explaining why he had had to leave the stage, why he knew that he was right. Word came from the arena: the explosive was a high-powered firecracker of some sort, probably an M-80. Hitchcock had been six inches from it when it had gone off; had it hit him directly, it most likely would have taken his face off. “I’ll go on the radio to help cool things off, but I won’t go back there and perform,” Alice said, and before long he dropped the subject. In the middle of the night, to entertain the policemen, he called the Amazing Randi’s room, and had a sleepy-faced Randi come down to the suite. Alice bet the cops five dollars that Randi could escape from double handcuffs locked behind his back. The policemen locked Randi up, and within three minutes he was free. “Five dollars,” Randi yawned. “I do not work for five dollars. Now, if you’d have put half a yard on it, Alice, I’d have done it with blood and everything.”

In the morning, the Toledo *Blade*'s early edition came out with its story of the trouble at the arena. We were just checking out of the Holiday Inn when the paper arrived at the hotel newsstand. Tom Davies’s fight feature on Alice had turned into a hard police story:

A member of the Alice Cooper rock band was injured and the group ended its concert after only two songs when the Toledo Sports Arena stage was showered with firecrackers and other debris Thursday night.

Michael Bruce, guitarist for the group, suffered facial injuries when he was struck by flying glass. A spokesman for the group said Bruce was playing the guitar under a lighted

archway when light bulbs exploded when they were hit by a firecracker.

Bruce was taken to Detroit for treatment by a physician.

He was expected to rejoin the band tonight in Toronto.

Thirty policemen were sent to the arena to assist 20 off-duty patrolmen trying to control the crowd when trouble developed about 9:45 p.m...

Mike Roswell, promotional director for the group, said that Alice Cooper, one of the biggest drawing rock acts in America, had added Toledo as a special date only 10 days ago...

Mr. Roswell said this was the first time the band ever had to end a concert because of crowd trouble...

The controversial band, which has sold more than nine million albums, has been criticized for encouraging violence and immorality in its shows...

Commenting on the incident at the arena, Mr. Roswell said, "It's something we didn't want to see happen. Other groups are going to be aware of this and are going to cancel."

Gerald Francis, general manager of the arena, who talked with Cooper after the aborted concert, said the rock star felt badly because he couldn't continue the show, but that he couldn't risk further injuries by going back on.

Mr. Francis said that the Alice Cooper group obviously would retain its share of the $38,000 that the concert grossed after the group had attempted to perform...

Mike Bruce came off the elevator and into the lobby with his girl from the night before. He smiled and said hello to the

rest of us, and someone handed him the *Blade*. Davies's article was the lead local story of the day.

Bruce read the first paragraph, and said, "What's this, 'a member?' Don't I have a name?"

"Second paragraph," said Mike Roswell.

Bruce handed his guitar case to a limousine driver. "You want to put this in the trunk?" he said. "Oh, and be careful for pieces of glass. The ones that didn't get imbedded in my eye may still be on the guitar." The Cooper people laughed.

Roswell and Bob Brown went over to a pay telephone, to call Davies at the *Blade* office. Roswell talked very politely and cordially to Davies as he lied:

"Saw your story, man, and I just wanted to fill you in on how it stands now. Mike's still in Detroit. He had some glass imbedded in his right eyelid... Yeah, man, I know what you mean. Thank God he's all right... Yeah, the hall manager talked to Alice last night and apologized. Yeah, you know Alice, everything's cool... Right. The doctor removed the glass, and Mike's going to meet us in Toronto tonight. I'd say the odds are better than even that he'll perform."

We rode back to the Detroit airport, and soon we were off for Toronto. The story of Bruce's "injury" would be picked up by the wire services, and would become the standard printed explanation for the halted concert in Toledo. *Rolling Stone* would come out with essentially the same story that Davies had written. Within a week, the Toledo *Blade* would run an editorial:

The outbreak of hooliganism and property destruction that marked the appearance of the Alice Cooper rock band at the

Sports Arena was more flagrant than previous incidents that have attended similar events in the house...

Let it be said that the Alice Cooper outfit panders to the basest of instincts and emotion, in the curious, almost perverse relationship it has with its special audience, and thus actually invites violent reactions. That, however, is no excuse for the kind of disturbances that are raising increased complaints about rock gatherings and certain other large events at the arena...

At the Cooper show—the concert ended almost before it began because of a barrage of items hurled at the performers, including a powerful firecracker that exploded and showered one member of the group with glass—youngsters in their early teens were seen carrying and drinking from fifths of whisky, other youths obviously under age were openly carrying six-packs of beer around, and the pot smoking was as common and as casual as a handshake...

Five persons were arrested there last Thursday night; one member of the Cooper band was taken to Detroit for medical attention after being struck in the eye with glass slivers; some $1,500 to $2,000 damage occurred; police were showered outside with rocks, bottles, and bricks; a patrol wagon window was broken, and a young girl was taken to the hospital for cuts over her eye. And all that had taken place by the time the Cooper troupe had done only two numbers.

It could have been worse despite the 30 policemen rushed to the scene to help 20 off-duty patrolmen handle the troublesome crowd—and, given management's willingness to let the arena be turned into a mob of overwrought young grass-smokers and boozers, one day it will.

On the Starship, Alice once again watched Humphrey Bogart tell Mary Astor, “I don’t care who loves who, I won’t play the sap. You killed Miles, and you’re going over.”

We all talked of the night before, but by now the tone was light, like a joke from somewhere in the dim past. “It’s glass eye,” the roadies called to Mike Bruce as he came down the aisle with a Coke. Norm Klein, in a tennis sweater, said, “Alice has decided what he’s going to do from now on. He’s going to hire David Cassidy to stand in front him on stage, and bat the things away.”

Libert’s voice came over the airplane’s public address system. “Good morning, hippies and affable freaks,” he said. “As you know, we have Customs in Toronto. I just hope your fucking suitcases are clean. Better think about it now. If you get busted going through Customs, we don’t know you. And to Mike Bruce—sincere condolences, and best wishes from all of us for a speedy recovery.”

For the rest of the tour, we seldom talked about the incident in Toledo—and never about the Mike Bruce story that had been fabricated to hide the truth. The tour was, after all, still built on the premise of the Alice Cooper group as vicious purveyors of fear and shock and violence. And no one seemed particularly anxious to dredge up memories of the night when, finally, it was all turned around, the night when we saw how quickly the audiences we taunted could rise up, how suddenly they could send the violence back at us and into our own lives, and cause us to run in breathless fear, a traveling band of Dr. Frankensteins on the lam in the 1970s.

THIRTEEN

Toledo was A psychological flash point for the tour. The angry events of that evening when we fled from the stage seemed to catalyze a reservoir of bruised feelings and emotions that had been simmering just beneath the surface, and the very next night, in Toronto, the resentments made themselves known. As far as the audiences could see, we were still the same famous band of demonically evil rock and roll perverts, pillaging the countryside as we gleefully brought our baby dolls and mutilated bodies into town. But inside the tour, there were flares of trouble.

I was sitting in the Toronto airport with Cindy Lang, waiting for the others to come through Customs. It was not a hard check. Cindy and I had been among the first ones through. I had been carrying my stage costume in a paper sack—normally it traveled with the other uniforms in a trunk, but Bob Gruen had asked me to take it on the Starship, in case he needed it as a prop for any airborne photographs. I had assumed that it was going to be interesting explaining to the Customs agent just what I was doing with a Santa Claus suit, but as soon as he saw it, he smiled and said, “Oh, you must be the one who gets stomped on stage every night.” The Cooper publicity machine had been doing its work well—the agent said he had seen the picture of Alice and me in the local newspaper, and had heard about the beating of Santa Claus on the radio. He made a fleeting pass at my suitcase, and waved me though without really digging into it. “You guys travel too much to try to sneak anything in with you,” he said. “Ever since Hendrix got arrested a few years ago for having stuff with him, groups have been careful when they come into Canada. Have a good show.”

Cindy was reading a paperback copy of *Sheila Levine Is Dead and Living in New York*. I asked her if she was going to

stay on the tour until the end.

“No, I’m not going to stay any longer than I have to,” she said. “I really hate to tour, because I used to do it so much when the group was first getting started, and road life was so hard. Now that it’s fairly good, with the charters and everything, I still can’t make myself like it. But Alice is so depressed, he called me the other night and said that he wanted me to be here. He’s so down about the tour. I think he’s tired of the whole thing. He’ll be okay once the tour gets to Norfolk, where it’s warm, and he can play some golf. And then there’s a couple of days in Tampa for him to spend all day on the course. I guess we’ll be spending Christmas down there. That’s the one thing that I get kind of sad about. Christmas and birthdays don’t mean anything, because he’s always playing somewhere. We’ll have Christmas in a Tampa motel room. It’s like that every year.”

Everyone cleared Customs with no problems, and we checked into the Hyatt Regency Toronto, a beautiful luxury hotel. But the first bit of tension hit us as soon as we arrived: we were told that the worst fear of Nicky Brazell, our young truck driver, had come true. His rig had broken down on the way to Canada, and there was no chance he would make it by show time. We would have to perform without the elaborate Cooper stage setting.

So it was with a sense of just trying to make the best of a bad situation that we went to Maple Leaf Gardens for the concert. The roadies considered the lack of a regular stage as a challenge, and they were having a good, if harried, time—buying a Christmas tree to put on the bare stage, and wrapping huge boxes to look like Christmas presents scattered about the stage, and constructing big silver-paper stars to hang from poles. We all pitched in to construct a makeshift lighting system, and I found myself kneeling on a

floor backstage, next to Shep Gordon, as we cut flaps of colored gel to be placed over the arena's regular white lights. The Amazing Randi was giving instructions to the roadies about how he was going to do the beheading scene without a guillotine: "We'll need more smoke on the stage than usual. I'll bring a sword down on Alice's head, and then they'll drag the body. It'll take a little more time than we give it most nights." Five minutes before we were due to go on, everyone in our troupe was lugging equipment and trying to make the stage look as good as possible. A Canadian-based Warner Brothers promotion man was making a nuisance of himself, babbling and giggling and getting in our way as we tried to set up a stage. The promo man was wearing a hockey jersey, a beard, and fur boots. He was dancing around with the Alice-body used in the beheading act, showing off for the backstage groupies, chirping that "I can't go without my Budweiser," because he knew it was Alice's favorite drink. He kept bumping into our roadies, who were panting as they tried to get the set in some kind of shape to do the show. But he wouldn't take a hint from the sneers and mutterings that were being directed at him. Rebecca constructed a dressing room out of folding chairs at the rear of the stage, to replace our usual one, which was built into the regular Billion Dollar Babies set that was on the truck somewhere.

Finally, Libert gave us the signal to go on. As we climbed onto the almost-empty stage, I heard a cry from behind us, in the back-of-the-stage balcony seats. "Hey Cooper, hey maniac!" a boy was screaming. "What you gonna do for me, maniac, what you gonna do tonight?" Alice heard him, too, but did not turn around to look. It was a reminder of the night before, and Libert went out and had an announcer tell the audience that if anything was thrown at the stage, the show would be stopped. The same announcement would be made every night for the rest of the tour —but it would

never be enough to convince us that the danger was not there. After Toledo, we would always be looking, always ready for the trouble to start. Even the flickering of sparklers deep in the audience, previously a festive, colorful sight every night, now seemed faintly ominous.

The show was good, the band was hard and rocking, but it was just not the same without the huge, flashing electric stage. Almost all of the theatrical drama that came with performing on the regular set was gone. It was like doing a big-budget Broadway musical on bare boards. Alice seemed a little tentative, a little reluctant to tease the audience, but I was seeing that in the context of what had happened the night before. The crowd, who had not seen the Toledo trouble, and had never seen the big stage, gasped at Alice and cheered for the concert.

Halfway through the show, I left the stage and went out into the hallway to look for a water fountain. There, standing with a friend, was Jack Richardson. Toronto was his home, and he had come back here after producing and doing the final mix on the *Muscle of Love* album in New York. He looked lost and out of place among the teenage Canadian longhairs in their jeans and glitter shirts as they swarmed around him in the corridor. Jack, paunchy and wearing a pair of loose trousers, waved to me, and we talked for a few minutes. He said he was sorry that the stage hadn’t made it, that he had been looking forward to seeing the full show. A few of the kids glanced at him quizzically, wondering what an older gentleman was doing at an Alice Cooper concert. I excused myself and went back to be Santa Claus, and then we all walked slowly to the dressing room.

A few minutes later, the blowup came.

The dressing room was hot, and some of us were anxious to get back to the hotel. Neal Smith, Mike Bruce, and I headed

for the limousines. There were two Cadillacs waiting for us inside the Maple Leaf Gardens: one parked directly outside the dressing room door, the other perhaps ten feet farther up a cement ramp. We got into the closer one, next to the dressing room.

A young girl who had managed to sneak backstage came up for autographs. She handed Mike her concert program, and he said, “I’ll sign my picture for you, if you can find it among all these shots of Alice.”

When the girl had left, the three of us leaned back to wait for the others. Neal stretched his long legs out, and flopped his boots on the back of the front seat. Mike and I drank from open cans of Coke.

“I don’t know why I’m so down on this tour,” Mike said.

“I know what you mean, man,” Neal said.

“I talked to Alice about it,” Mike said. “I asked him why he was drinking all this beer, playing golf, doing this whole Dean Martin trip. He said that he’s been doing what we’re doing for the past nine years, and now he’s sick of it. He said he’s ready to do something else.”

“Yeah?” Neal said. “Well, you know something? I liked it tonight. Everyone was so worried about the stage. Fuck the stage. I like playing on a bare stage. It’s like we used to be. We can just play our music.”

“Yeah, but that’s not what we’re about now,” Mike said. “Now we’re about Alice and his bodyguard.”

“I know it,” Neal said. “What is all this theatrical shit? I just want to play my drums and make rock and roll music.”

“But Shep doesn’t think that way,” Mike said. “The bread’s working this way, so Shep’s happy.”

“I don’t give a shit about the bread, man,” Neal said. “I got enough bread.”

“We’ll get a million and a half in escrow from the courts on that publishing lawsuit that’s been going on for a couple years,” Mike said. “We have the bread. Tell me something, Neal. Do you want to do this show the way it is any more?”

“No, man,” Neal said. “We have to make some changes.”

“Like us coming out on the stage like a bunch of silly assholes, dragging Alice’s dead body like it was something special,” Mike said. “I’m so sick of that.”

“Alice, Alice, Alice,” Neal said. “It’s like the rest of us don’t even fucking exist.”

And then, at the worst possible moment, it happened. The chauffeur of the car in which we were sitting, a prissy, thin man named J.C., stuck his head through the open back seat window. “Would you mind moving to the car up ahead?” he said.

Neal did not answer.

“Would you mind moving to the front car?” the chauffeur repeated.

‘I’m not moving anywhere,” Neal said. “I’m staying right here. Why should I move?”

“They need it,” the chauffeur said.

“Who’s they?” Neal said.

“Alice and his girlfriend,” the chauffeur said.

I thought that the veins in Neal's neck were going to hemorrhage. His face turned crimson. He slammed his legs into the seat. "FUCK THAT, MAN!" he exploded. "ALICE CAN FUCKING WALK, GODDAMN IT! I PAY FOR BOTH THESE CARS! YOU, MAN, YOU JUST GET THE FUCK OUT OF HERE!"

Mike Bruce was shaking his head. "Alice's bodyguard will get him to the other car safely," he said. "He won't be mugged on the way."

"LIBERT!" Neal shouted. "LIBERT!"

David Libert came hurrying out of the dressing room. He must have thought that Neal had been shot, from the sound of the screaming.

"LIBERT, WHAT IS THIS SHIT?" Neal bellowed, his body trembling. "NOBODY TELLS ME TO MOVE OUT OF MY CAR!"

Libert had no idea what was going on. "Huh?" he said. "What happened?"

But Mike Roswell had been standing near our car when the chauffeur had made his request, and now he came out of the dressing room, escorting Alice, Cindy, and Norm. "Alice, come on with me," Roswell said. He deposited Alice in the front car, then came back to join us.

"It's okay, Neal," Roswell said. "It's cool."

Neal had settled down a bit, but was still in an advanced state of rage. "Fuck it, Roswell!" he said. "It's not cool!"

We were ready to leave the arena. Our chauffeur, who may have sensed that he had perhaps said the wrong thing, slipped behind the wheel and tried to become invisible. We rode out into traffic.

“I know all the trips you guys are going through,” Roswell said.

“Our trip is that we’re a goddamn backup band,” Mike Bruce said.

“I don’t think of you as that,” Roswell said. “When I’m doing my promotional stuff, I always refer to you as Alice Cooper Incorporated, or as the Alice Cooper group.”

“Oh, come on, Roswell,” Neal said. “In that office, there’s one picture of the group, and a hundred of Alice.”

“I love you guys,” Roswell said. “I just want the group to stay together.”

“You don’t see us getting bodyguards to carry our bags,” Neal said. “We know where Shep’s at. Why can’t he get more people in the office to put stories on the whole group out?”

“Look,” Roswell said. “I’d do anything for you guys. I sit on the front of the stage every night and get the shit beat out of me to keep people away from you. We can work this all out.”

“I’m sick of all of it,” Neal said. “Either there’s going to be changes, or we can just fuck it. No one tells me to get out of my car, man.”

“As soon as the tour ends, we can get things straightened out,” Roswell said.

“No we won’t,” Mike Bruce said. “We’re a backup band for Alice. There’s no getting around it. Do you think that if *I* would have been afraid to go back onstage last night, and Alice would have said that he wanted to play, that we would have stayed off? You know we would have played.”

“No, no, we’ll get everything worked out,” Roswell said.

“Fuck it,” Mike Bruce said. “It’s history. It’s happened.”

At first, when these outpourings of the group’s angers and insecurities happened in my presence, I had been embarrassed and uncomfortable. Granted, I had been allowed to be a member of the show for the tour, but when the squabbling started, I always felt like a guest at a family dinner who has just seen the husband slap the wife across the face.

But more and more, as the band increasingly accepted me as a part of the traveling party, it seemed to me that they actually welcomed my witnessing these outbursts of frustration, as if having them in front of someone from another world provided them with a strange form of catharsis. I sensed that Mike and Neal, particularly, enjoyed sharing their acrimony. They often questioned me about what I thought of their complaints against Alice’s domination of the group; and when they perceived that I was reluctant to get into it, they made a point of checking my facial expressions as they talked, to get non-verbal reactions from me.

So on this night in Toronto, in the limousine, I realized that they knew I understood what was going on in the group, and that they were not ashamed of their own attitudes. It was a complex situation. They did not hate Alice; they did not hate Shep. The band and the managers had been together for so many years that they were all virtually the only real friends they had. The years on the road in their effort to achieve the heights had made them absolutely dependent on each other for every kind of support. For the past nine years, they had all shared virtually the same experiences, the same days and nights, the same lives. And in Neal’s and Mike’s anger at

Alice's emerging solo fame, I sensed a great deal more than mere ego and jealousy. The more I heard them talk, the more I felt that they were very afraid of what might happen if Alice really did decide he was sick of it, if Alice really did decide that his days as a member of a traveling rock and roll band were over, and that it was time for him to move on. In the years when they were on the way up, such a thought never had occurred to them. But now that they were on top, it seemed that the rest of the group was realizing for the first time that Alice really could, if he wanted, get along without them; that Alice really could walk away from it and not be hurt. The same could not be said for the other four, of course, who would be right back where they started without the Alice Cooper name—and their vitriol at Alice's prominence said something about their defensiveness and need for one another that created in me a kind of sympathy.

So when the shouting started in the limousine, I was not surprised, and I could understand the reasons for it. As a matter of fact, only a few hours earlier I had had a long dinner with Mike Bruce, where we had talked about the same subject in a calmer, mellower atmosphere. And as we rode back from the show in the limousine, I thought about what Mike had said at dinner, and about the problems that might lie ahead for these young American heroes.

"It was always my dream to go out on the road in a band," Mike had said. "My dad was a route man for Coca-Cola. I was very athletic, a letterman, a sophomore class officer in high school. My parents called me the All-American boy. But as soon as I got into rock and roll, I knew that this was all that I wanted."

We had been sitting in the middle of a hotel dining room, and Mike was attracting the usual number of stares for his hair and his rock and roll clothing. He was the group's chief

philanderer, and usually he could feel a girl looking at him from fifty feet away. But as we talked and ate our dinner, he was not bothering to return the glances; he spoke slowly and quietly about the things that had been troubling him.

“For years we went without Alice as a front man,” he said. “He was just Vince, one of the five of us. Then Shep and Joe Greenberg had a meeting with us, and they said that Alice should become the focus of the group. Everyone just assumed that it would happen to the rest of the members, too, as time went by. But it hasn’t happened. Back then, it was anything goes, we just wanted to make it so badly. So we didn’t say anything. And then all of a sudden, the whole group is centered on Alice. About a year ago, we told the managers that all of this pushing of Alice as a big star should go on in the office, in the promotion, but when we’re on the road we should be together, like we’re all just as big as the next guy. But you see how it is.

“And now that Alice is such a star, he’s going around telling the rest of us how bored he is with it, how much he’d rather be doing something else. He seems to be itching to get into some films. He wants to be a movie star now. Well, if he gets that, then I’m ready to go. I’ll go ahead and start on my own thing. I can’t hold my breath forever. I’ll have to apply a little pressure, but if I have to do it, I will.”

I asked Mike if it didn’t scare him, the prospect of going out alone, without the Alice Cooper name. I said that the odds against making it big in rock and roll were so phenomenally stacked against succeeding even once—and wasn’t hoping to reach the top twice awfully unrealistic?

“I don’t think so,” he said. “It’s always been my desire to do an album of my own. I’ve already cut four tracks, and if you heard the tape, you’d know that they could be as big as anything Alice Cooper has done. I started writing songs for

the group a long time ago, so there's no reason I couldn't do it for myself. My lyrics are a little more positive than Alice's. I'll tell you the truth, I write number one songs, and Alice ruins them. I wrote 'Never Been Sold Before,' and 'School's Out,' and 'I'm Eighteen.' Then Alice takes them and puts his own weird lyrics, his own little fantasies, in them, and they're not number one songs any more, they're just songs that fit the stage image we've built up.

"I have talent. People are always saying that the reason we're so big is the formula, the violent negative thing. David Libert is always telling us that, how important it is to stay with what we've got. When we used to all live in the same house, Libert told us that if we ever moved out to our own places, we'd fall apart. He was wrong about that. Now everyone's saying the same thing about Alice, that if we ever quit emphasizing Alice we'd fall apart. Well, I don't believe that. In a way, this group is holding me back. I have a faith in my own ability."

I didn't know quite how to respond to Mike on that one. I tried to explain that yes, I had seen him on stage every night, and yes, I knew what a good rock and roll guitarist he was. But at the same time, it all came back to the problem of making it, when you're one competent rock band among thousands of others. And I wondered, didn't he understand the huge role that Shep Gordon was playing in their success, didn't he concede that without the sick, gory stage show, without the creation of Alice as an individual professionally perverted central figure, the band most likely would never have gone anywhere?

"I guess I just don't fit into the Shep Gordon aura," Mike said. "If I was a star in my own right, if I had written a hit song for Crosby, Stills, and Nash or something, maybe I'd be accepted better by Shep. Shep doesn't care about the

music, he just cares about the dead babies, and that stuff. All Shep cares about is pushing Alice, making Alice a bigger and bigger star on his own.

“There’s such catering done for Alice. It borders on... I don’t know. I heard that a big reason Norm is along on this tour is to keep Alice away from too much booze, as much as anything. Alice has made it, but what has he got? If I was Alice, I’d feel pretty locked in. Here we are, one of the top groups in the world, but *I* don’t feel locked in. Alice wants to get away from his evil image now, but it’s too late. He’s trapped. Me, this is all just a steppingstone to the things I really want to do.

“Shep has to do everything, he has to have complete control over everybody. Like with Glen. Glen wasn’t even on the last album. He can’t even play. Now how he cops to that in his head, I don’t know. When he’s with the rest of us, it’s like having a class full of fifth graders learning about science, and there’s a third grader in the room. His fingers keep falling off the strings. He can play ‘Eighteen,’ because he’s been doing it for three years, but sometimes he can’t even do that right. That’s why we have Mick Mashbir and Bob Dolin on stage with us, but as soon as some of us started talking about putting Mick in the group as a regular member in place of Glen, Shep wouldn’t even hear of it. He said that Glen got the most fan mail, so we had to keep him. That’s such bullshit. You know that Glen doesn’t get any more fan mail than the rest of us, but Shep won’t change anything as long as it’s working, and to him the music doesn’t matter.”

I told Mike that perhaps it was just because I was looking at the situation from another perspective—but that it seemed to me that he was missing an awfully important point. Namely, that despite all of the inside problems he saw in the group, he was still leading a life that millions of young men

all over the world could only dream about. To be a young popstar, a wealthy international traveler, a Starship rider, was something that other people would die for. I told him that I sensed it every night, even in my brief time on stage—the wondrous, remarkable thrill of having fifteen thousand pairs of eyes trained on you, of hearing fifteen thousand voices screaming, of recoiling from the force of the Super Trouper spotlights, of seeing the bodies packed in, all the way up to the ceiling, there to be entertained. I told Mike that to be able to make a living that way, much less to become genuinely rich while doing it, seemed to me to be an awesome piece of good fortune, and something to be forever thankful for. I asked him to think of all the local bands that would never know what it was like to have worldwide fame—and beyond that, to think of all the young bank clerks and clothing salesmen and car hikers who would trade their whole lives for one night of that kind of rush. And I asked him if, for the pleasure of living his kind of rock and roll life, it was not worth it to sacrifice some measure of personal fame, if it was not worth it to let Alice be the biggest attraction in the band, and to have the press notices.

Mike nodded. “I can see how you might think that way,” he said. “But look at it this way for a minute. Everyone knew who was in the Beatles, and who was in the Rolling Stones. Everyone knew all of those guys by name. Well, we’re as big as the Beatles or the Stones ever were. And nobody knows any of us but Alice. We just got lost in the shuffle. When Warner Brothers brought out the first promotional pictures for the *Muscle of Love* album, Dennis had been cropped out of the photograph. They didn’t even realize he was in the group.

“On the tour before this one, our opening act was a group called Flo and Eddie, they’d go on before us, just like ZZ Top

does on this tour. They were funny guys, and they made Alice laugh. So because Alice liked them, in every city where there'd by a press conference, Alice chose to take Flo and Eddie to sit with him in front of the cameras, instead of taking the rest of the group. Now how do you think that made us feel?

"We care about these things. Neal's aching so much to get recognition for himself that he's saying stupid things about what a great drummer he is when a guy from a music magazine interviews him. It's like raising a kid with no candy, he goes to a candy store and gobbles it up. We're all like that. We lick at whatever we can, because we want people to know that we're good musicians. We see a writer from *Rolling Stone*, and we go over to *him*. It's every man for himself, except for Alice.

"I'll tell you one thing. We all own that name. We're all Alice Cooper. And if Alice goes into movies, we split the money five ways, for the rest of his life. It's the name he'd be selling, and we've all built it up, so why shouldn't we all split his movie money? And if I should open up an Alice Cooper Music Shop or something like that, I'd split that money five ways, too."

Mike stopped talking, and he smiled. "Come on," he said. "We'd better go get ready for the show. Do I sound bitter? I don't mean to. Actually, I'm happy about the way everything has turned out. You start out thinking how perfect something will be, and then it comes true, and you see what the reality is. But you learn from it. And that's worth something."

J. C. drove his limousine down the final block to the hotel. Mike and Neal had put an end to their dialogue with Roswell, and the only sound in the car was that of the radio, tuned to a local rock station.

The lead limousine had arrived perhaps thirty seconds before ours did. So as we entered the hotel lobby, Alice and the other riders from the lead car were already getting into an elevator. The lobby was full of young fans, and as soon as Alice and Cindy stepped onto the elevator, about twenty of them tried to crowd in also. Norm Klein went berserk at the sight of this, barking at the fans and heaving them out at random and ordering everyone but Alice and Cindy to get out of the elevator car. When the intruders were gone. Norm punched the “close door” button, and the doors clacked shut in the faces of the lobby teenagers—-and in the faces of the rest of us who had returned from the concert.

Libert and Roswell looked at each other. They didn’t want another Neal Smith explosion. So Roswell charged into another waiting elevator car, and loudly evicted two middle-aged couples who were trying to go up to their rooms. Then Libert escorted Neal, Mike, Glen, Dennis, Cindy Smith, and me into the elevator. Libert and Roswell stood at the entrance to the elevator car, their arms crossed, as if to defend us against the army of ecstatic fans. But no one was trying to get on, and the Libert-Roswell attempt to spread the deference and bodyguarding to the rest of the band was so silly, while at the same time sincere, that by the time we got to our floor we were laughing so hard that we had to wipe our eyes.

Later that night, I was at a party in one of the roadies’ rooms. There were people covering every available square foot of floor. chair, and bed space—roadies, managers, record company people, local scenesters. A television set was turned to a Toronto station that broadcast pornographic movies on Friday nights. There was an abundance of unattached girls in the room, and Mike Bruce was the only regular Cooper musician present. He surveyed the available talent, selected six girls, and motioned for them to follow

him out of the party. As they left, he leaned down and whispered to me: “I have to do my act here. Can’t pull it off when Alice is in the same room.”

FOURTEEN

On the road, it was easy to get so immersed in the internal concerns of the tour that it became almost natural to forget that to most people in the United States, the Alice Cooper show was not a curious amalgam of personalities and disputes and timetables and ledger books and mechanical concerns—but instead was simply an obscene, distasteful rock and roll show that was symbolic, perhaps, of the downfall of American society. That view of the Cooper phenomenon—the view the band had worked so diligently to spread—was more clearly seen from the outside. And in Syracuse I was to observe up close just how determined one group of outsiders was to protect their community from everything that Alice Cooper stood for.

I first became aware of the situation on the Starship, en route from Toronto to Syracuse, where we would be performing that evening. The afternoon's featured movie on the plane was *Give Me a Sailor*, an unheralded pornographic classic that had the carpeted floors in front of the TV monitors packed with cheerfully vociferous viewers. Midway through the flight, Shep Gordon sat down next to me on one of the couches and said, "I may need your help tonight."

I turned away from the movie to see what he meant. "I don't know if you've heard about it, but they're trying to ban our show in Binghamton, New York, on the twenty-ninth," he said. "Last night, some men from the board of directors of their arena came up to Toronto to see the show. Apparently they're being very difficult, and one of the things they objected to most was the Santa Claus thing. They thought that killing Santa Claus as a climax to the show was one more incitement to violence, or something.

"They're coming to the show in Syracuse again tonight. I'm going to meet with them before the concert, and I'd like for

you to be there, just to show that we're willing to sit down with them. Alice and Randi will be there too. And at the end of the show tonight, when the band attacks you? Instead of just letting them carry you off, flash the peace sign or wave or something, on the way off stage, so it's obvious that you're not supposed to be dead. I know it sounds silly. But we want to play Binghamton. It's a small hall, but I don't like the idea of losing a date in the middle of the tour—and I don't like the idea of anyone getting away with banning us from their town."

It was lip-splitting cold in Syracuse, and we were held up by Customs agents for about an hour in a windy, unheated hangar. They didn't find any contraband, but by the time they had finished their complete, painstaking search of the plane and every piece of our baggage, we were all in a mood to hurry to the Ramada Inn. I asked Libert if such concerted Customs examinations were normal. "It depends," he said. "This is a bad one, but at least we knew it was coming. The United States Customs guys in Canada warned me that the agents in Syracuse were going to be looking hard. A while ago, when we came back from Vancouver, they had three narcos waiting for us at the airport in Minneapolis. They took Mick Mashbir into a back room, stripped him, and looked up inside of him with a flashlight."

By the time we were ready to leave the motel for the show at night, dealing with the commissioners from Binghamton had become only one of our problems. Nicky Brazell's truck had broken down once more on the way from Toronto, and so the Syracuse concert was going to have to be played without the regular stage setting again. We rode to the War Memorial Coliseum, and Libert said, "Nicky is such a good guy, but I don't know what we're going to do. He'd had no sleep at all when he started driving out of Toronto, and when the truck broke down, he tried to fix it. He knows that you don't do

that. When your truck breaks down, you don’t try to repair it, you call ahead to us. You let someone who hasn’t been trying to drive for ten hours make the decision.”

On the limousine’s radio, a Syracuse newscaster was reading some wire copy about a new development concerning President Nixon and the Watergate case. “You know,” said Alice, as he waited for Norm to pop him open a fresh beer, “there’s an easy solution to prevent things like Watergate. The President should get paid a million dollars a year in salary. That way, there’s no room for corruption. The way it is now, I make more than the President does. What do they expect?”

When we arrived at the hall, I watched the roadies hook up the Cooper sound equipment for a while, and then went to find the meeting with the Binghamton commissioners. I got some directions from the hall security people, and made my way to a back staircase. Up two flights, I found four reporters and photographers representing the Binghamton newspapers. They had driven the eighty miles to Syracuse to cover their board’s actions, but they had been told that they were not allowed to see the meeting. So they were waiting outside a closed door, and they told me that the meeting had just begun.

I walked inside. There was Shep—and there, sitting on folding chairs, were four middle-aged men, all wearing suits or sports coats. Even the newest rock and roll arenas tended to take on a grungy, musky atmosphere on show nights, and the War Memorial in Syracuse was far from new. The men from Binghamton looked distinctly uncomfortable as they sat in the small, claustrophobic, overheated room, with the background sounds of the milling audience and the squealing feedback of our PA system being adjusted. This was the period between ZZ Top’s last number and the first

song of the Alice Cooper show—and it was going to be a long wait tonight, because the roadies were once again going to have to improvise with the stage.

“Ah,” Shep said. “Please come in. Bob. I’d like to have you join us.”

I had always thought that Shep spoke in persuasive and conciliatory tones—but I had never heard him anywhere near the beatific plateau he was reaching tonight. He sounded like a minister beginning his Easter sermon.

“Gentlemen, I’d like you to meet Bob Greene,” Shep said. “Bob is a columnist for the Chicago *Sun-Time*s, and as a result of his experiences traveling with President Nixon, he wrote the best-selling book *Running*.”

I closed my eyes momentarily. In a span of fifteen seconds, Shep had linked me with the President of the United States, and had elevated a book I had written about the 1972 presidential campaign to a sales status that even my own mother would have had to laugh at as a blatant and delirious untruth. But Shep’s voice was warm and convincing, and when I opened my eyes, I found that the four gentlemen from Binghamton were looking with unhidden interest and apparent respect at me, the traveling buddy of the President and chart-topping author. I smiled weakly. Shep continued:

“Now, I know that you gentlemen were concerned about the Santa Claus aspect of our show. And I wanted to assure you that our purpose in using that finale is purely for a good-natured theatrical ending to the show. I want you to watch it again tonight, and I thought you would enjoy meeting Bob.”

Douglas Seaman, the burly, white-haired chairman of the Binghamton arena board, nodded toward me, and said, “Mr.

Greene, do I understand that you, as a reporter, have observed this Santa Claus act, and the rest of the show?"

"Well..." I started to say.

"Gentlemen, Bob is Santa Claus," Shep said. "He plays Santa Claus on the stage. He is performing and traveling with us as a part of the show. I simply thought you might enjoy saying hello to him."

The four men from Binghamton fell silent. Somehow, in the time since I had entered the room, I had been used to cement an intimate connection between the White House and Alice Cooper. The four of them sat back to listen to Shep, and so did I. I was about to witness a performance that would make the Cooper stage show look like amateur night. Gordon was in high gear, and it was just beginning.

The background on the story was this: On September 29, Dave Bourdon of the *Binghamton Press* had led his rock and roll column with a three-paragraph item:

The last Saturday night of the year should be a strange one in the old town: that's when Alice Cooper will bring his snake, guillotine and dead babies into the Broome County Veterans' Memorial Arena.

Arena manager Charles Theokas confirmed that Alice, the would-be king and/or would-be queen of bizarre rock, will perform at the Arena Dec. 29.

Adds Theokas quickly: tickets are not on sale yet. A later date will be set for that brutal race...

The reaction in Binghamton was immediate and fierce. It seems that the arena manager had given permission to promoter Dick Klotzman to stage the Cooper show, but had not checked for approval with the board of directors of the

hall. Some members of the community voiced their objections to the board; their arena had just been constructed, and they did not want an act like Alice Cooper appearing there. On October 25, the arena board met. They talked about what they had heard of the show—the beheading, the chopping of the doll, the use of the snake. Broome County Executive Edwin L. Crawford came to the meeting and said, “I have very strong feelings about it. I don’t know if Broome County ever will be ready for Alice Cooper. I hope that this show does not come to the building. I’m sure that there is a place for Alice Cooper in the world of entertainment, but I don’t think this is it.” A member of the arena board said, “The veterans are already upset because they think we don’t play the national anthem enough. Imagine what they will say about Alice.” One member of the board, Alexander Horwitz, said that he was not willing to censor a performance he had not seen; but after listening to other board members discuss what they had heard about the Cooper show, Horwitz said, “It’s disgusting, then, isn’t it?” In the end, he voted with the rest of the board. The motion was: “We don’t need Alice Cooper in the Arena at this time.” It passed unanimously.

In the weeks that followed, the Cooper controversy became the hottest continuing local story in Binghamton. The newspapers ran headline after headline:

ALICE’S AGENT SAYS SHOW WILL GO ON
ARENA REPEATS BAN ON DECEMBER ALICE SHOW
BANNING SHOW HURTS ALICE, PROMOTER SAYS
CRAWFORD SAYS HE WON’T ‘KNUCKLE UNDER’ ON COOPER
MAY SEEK ALICE SHOW PREVIEW TO CHANGE VOTE
ALICE’S SHOW MORALITY PLAY,
PROMOTER SAYS STILL NO ARENA ALICE SHOW

There were editorials attempting to find some rational middle ground in the dispute. The ministers of the Greater Binghamton Baptist Ministorium passed a resolution

supporting the ban, because they felt the concert “would contribute adversely to the moral climate of our community.” The Reverend Glenn Gevert, chairman of the ministers’ group, told a local reporter that the Cooper show was “pollution” that appealed to the “lustful, sensual nature of people,” and added, “You are what you eat, spiritually. If people go to this entertainment, they get in the habit of feeding this lower nature.” There were letters-to-the-editor, many of them from young people who said that they wanted to go to the Cooper concert, and that it was hypocritical for the arena board to ban a show none of the members had ever seen. Other letter writers saw it another way:

What a pitiful shame that “Alice Cooper” could even cause such a controversy! There was a time (not so long ago) when one so obviously demented would have been institutionalized. However, now it’s “in” to “do your own thing” regardless of how sadistic and perverted...

Alice Cooper is a blatant exhibitionist who apparently will do any disgusting thing for money... Obviously minors should not be allowed to attend such an affair...

Rather than fade away, the Cooper controversy grew stronger in Binghamton. Dave Bourdon, the reporter whose three-paragraph item had started the whole thing, and reporter Tom Muller were assigned to follow the developments for the Press. Finally, when it became evident that the issue was not going to disappear, the four-man committee from the arena board decided that the best thing to do would be to see the show for themselves, and reconsider their decision. So the four men left Binghamton, a town of sixty-two thousand near the New York—Pennsylvania border, and went to watch two Cooper shows—the one in Toronto, and the one tonight, in Syracuse. And here they were, listening to this polite, soft-spoken young man, Shep

Gordon, explain to them why they should let his act into their community.

Before launching into his main sell, Shep introduced the four men to the Amazing Randi. Shep said that Randi would never take part in any show that would damage his fine and long-standing reputation in show business. “That’s right,” Randi said. “When I first had the chance to join the show, I was going to say no, because I heard that they killed chickens and were transvestites. I thought that these people were a shame on the entertainment business. But I found out differently. They are complete professionals.”

When Randi had finished, Shep called in his second witness, Alice himself. Alice came into the room wearing his sailor suit and sailor hat. He shook hands with each of the four men, and then spoke briefly and directly:

“We aren’t about to spoil a good thing. I’m aware that the younger generation has never seen Busby Berkeley, and the great people in the entertainment industry. So we’re trying to bring that kind of entertainment to them. We make our shows a morality play, in which I misbehave, and then I am punished, and then I am executed. The kids realize that—even if they can’t put it into so many words, they realize it. I’m not able to understand how people think that I incite the audience to violence. We leave the kids drained, rather than incited. We provide surrogate violence. I can hardly blame you for your misconceptions, because I know what people say about us. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have to go get ready for the show.”

And with that, Alice left the room. The men had been listening attentively, and now the stage was set for Shep Gordon. He began presenting his case, the voice still soft and friendly:

“You have seen Alice. You’ve seen that he’s not what you have heard. He is not an animal. He is not a monster. He is a performer. A very dedicated performer. A performer who does not want to risk what he has worked so hard for.”

Seaman, the chairman, addressed himself to Shep: “Very frankly, though, when we were considering booking acts into the new hall, the first thing we were told by the people in charge of getting the acts was, ‘We won’t have any acts like Alice Cooper.’ I didn’t even know who Alice Cooper was. I thought he was a her.”

Shep shook his head, and allowed a look of hurt and sadness to make its way across his face.

“And then,” Seaman said, “when we asked, we were told that Alice Cooper was sick, that he was obscene.”

Shep looked into the eyes of each man in turn. He began to speak in the approximate modulation of Winston Churchill. “Yes,” he said, “I can understand how, if you have never seen the show, you might believe some press reports. But let me tell you, gentlemen—this is a business. This is not a whim. Alice does not approach this as a whim. He works. He has worked for the past nine years at this. Last year alone, Alice grossed seventeen million dollars, through records, performances, programs, and other means. He is not about to throw that away. And of that seventeen million, I make several million dollars myself. And I am not about to give that up. I am not about to risk that by giving an obscene or suggestive show.”

Dr. John Green, a Binghamton podiatrist and board member, said, “But last night, someone on stage said something…”

“What was said?” Shep asked.

“Well,” Dr. Green said, “the announcer said to the crowd... he said... he said, ‘Get your shit together.’”

An expression of shock and disbelief flashed onto Shep’s face.

“Now, I don’t think that the person who made that announcement was with the band,” said Alton Carpenter, a board member who was wearing a light sport coat.

“He most certainly was *not*,” Shep said, with the indignation of a nun who has just had a lecher stick a hand up her habit. “No one with our group would ever do that. If anyone did do that, he would be dismissed, by me, immediately. We would not risk that.”

Seaman said, “You’re right. It was the announcer for the arena up there who said it.”

Shep displayed another look of disappointment at how foul humanity could become.

“I’d like to ask you a question,” said Allan Cave, a dark, melancholy-looking board member who was also the principal of a junior high school in Binghamton. “I’d like to know what is the significance of some of those things? Of the tooth? Of the snake? I’ve heard that both of those things have sexual connotations.”

“I am the person who writes the show,” Shep said, “And I’d like to explain to you how I wrote these two parts. The tooth part—that was from an old Colgate Gardol commercial. When I was a child, that was the most effective commercial I had ever seen. I watched it more than I watched the show. It stayed with me. So I wrote it into *our* show. The tooth sequence, it’s just a theatrical re-creation of the Gardol commercial. Alice attacks the tooth with a big wooden

brush, and at the end of the sequence—the crowd cheers. They cheer wildly!”

“You mean, then,” Cave said, “that entire scene with the tooth is nothing more than a takeoff on a Colgate commercial?”

“You might be interested to know that, beginning next March, Colgate toothpaste is going to use Alice and the tooth in their commercials,” Shep lied.

“That’s the tooth,” he continued. “Now for the snake. Several years ago, when I was in Jamaica, I saw a snake dance. Everyone in the audience was hypnotized. *Hypnotized* by the snake. When they came out of the show, everyone reacted in a different way. I thought it was the funniest thing I had ever seen. I had gone to the performance with a party of six people. A woman in our party thought it was the height of sexuality. A man was frightened out of his senses, because of his fear of snakes. No one responded the same way. But it got a *reaction*. At the average rock show, the audience does this.” Shep pretended to fall asleep, and muttered “far out, far out” with his eyes closed. “Tonight, at our show, you will see people do *this*.” He put a wide-eyed look of surprise on his face, held up his hands, and let out a loud gasp. “They say that you can’t get young people to care anymore. But we do it. We get them to *care*. We get them to *react*. They will laugh, they will cringe with fright, they will cheer with happiness.”

It went on like that for perhaps thirty minutes. I watched and did not interrupt; it was Shep’s show, and he was handling it masterfully. He was reasonable, he had an answer for every question. Why did the band do such disgusting things? To establish Alice as an evil force, who is punished at the end for his wrongs. Why did the group have such a bad reputation? Because the press likes to print only the

negative, controversial things. What guarantee was there that Alice would not step over the line into even more savagery? Alice was a businessman, and was far too concerned about his finances to take a chance on losing out on money by putting on an unacceptable show.

More important than what Shep was saying was the impression he was giving the board members by his manner and style. If they had come into the room expecting to find some brash, loudmouthed rock and roll punk of a manager, they were being pleasantly surprised. They took to Gordon instinctively. They liked talking to him. He was the kind of a young man they would have liked to have as a son. Serious. Concerned. Responsible. And it was only every once in a while that a quizzical look would return to the face of one board member or another—yes, but this serious, concerned, responsible young man was the person who was behind all of the vicious madness that had been putting their lives in turmoil for the past two months.

I watched all of this with a combination of feelings. Had I been living in Binghamton, and following the Cooper controversy in the newspapers, I would probably be dead set against these board members, and would think of them as some sort of ignorant, redneck censors who had the gall to ban something they had never seen. Or, if I was of another ideological persuasion, I probably would think of them as heroes, doing their brave best to save the purity of the town.

But looking at them in this little room, I saw them in neither aspect. Rather, they seemed to me to be decent, well-meaning men who were confused and upset by a phenomenon that frightened and puzzled them—and who were trying to do the right thing about it. In these men I did not see a bunch of stereotypical book burners, out to impose their own standards on the rest of the world. Instead, they

were guileless, reluctant consumers of the outrageous Cooper publicity that had been methodically ground out over the past few years, and they thought that they were doing something good by protecting their children from seeing the show. I could not hate them for that; if I were the father of a young boy or girl, and if I were looking at the rock and roll world from a span of thirty years, I just might be a little scared too at the prospect of this Alice Cooper coming to my small town. That was the whole point of the image-building, wasn't it?

What the men did not really understand, of course, was that it made no difference what they decided. If they believed that Alice Cooper was evil, then they might have realized that the show was not the danger, but only a symptom of what threatened them. Shep Gordon could explain for hours about the bad-deeds-resulting-in-punishment aspects of the show—but the fact remained that the children were not going to the concerts because they wanted to see a morality play; they were going because they were roused by the sight of simulated violence and bloodshed. The Cooper show was only cashing in on this somber bit of sociology, not creating it. If we were not allowed to perform in Binghamton, the excited interest among the children of these men would not vanish—they would find other attractions, other titillations. And as I watched the board members trying to understand what Shep was saying, at least part of me admired them for caring enough to try to find out.

"I'm a school principal," said Cave. "There is a meeting at my school tonight, but I skipped it, and I'm here because I want to learn and be open-minded."

Shep offered a look of understanding.

"And I'm a doctor," said Dr. Green. "A patient said to me, 'You're ruining my life. I want to go see Alice Cooper, and I'm

not a rich doctor like you, I can’t afford to go all the way to New York City to see a show.’ This is getting out of hand.”

“I’m certainly glad I’m not in the position of making the decision, the position you gentlemen are in,” Shep said. “But if I may say so, Alice stands to lose a great deal here. He is a performer—and if you deny him your hall, the same rumors will be fed, the same rumors that you heard. He will be damaged. People will tell hall managers that Alice Cooper was not allowed to play in your arena. That attitude could spread. And I leave it to you gentlemen to decide the morality of doing this to this young man.”

Shep paused. There was silence in the room.

“If I may ask, what did you think of the show in Toronto last night?” Shep said.

“Frankly, I couldn’t see,” Seaman said. “They were all standing up. I was on a chair, but I couldn’t see enough of what was going on.”

“Gentlemen, the show is beginning,” Shep said. “I will see to it that you are allowed to stand backstage and watch from the wings. May I suggest that we meet here in this room again after the show?”

The four men from Binghamton watched the concert from the side of the stage. After the performance, they met again with Gordon, for almost an hour. One board member. Seaman, said that the show had not been quite as bad as he had been led to believe. The others had mixed feelings, but were not as vehement about upholding the ban. But the board members told Gordon that the Cooper tour still could not come to Binghamton on December 29, because that decision had already been made. Perhaps some other time, they said.

While the men were having their post-show meeting with Gordon, Dave Bourdon was writing a review of the concert for his readers in Binghamton:

Syracuse—Everything you've heard about an Alice Cooper concert is true.

There is violence. Alice fights a giant tooth with, yes, a giant toothbrush. There is sexual sadism. Alice tears the clothes off a baby doll, then hatchets "little Betty." There is perversion. The Cooper band simulates a feast on mannequin parts.

Other than that, the difference between a Cooper show and any other rock act might be, as a critic for the national magazine Rolling Stone phrased it, "in terms of showmanship, Alice Cooper's is perhaps the most completely realized stage performance of its genre ever presented."

To the 8,000 fans in the War Memorial in Syracuse Saturday night, such literary accreditation did not seem to matter. To them, it was just a dam good show.

They were on their feet from the start, all except for the stage-front crowd, the lucky ones with the best seats. Rooted they stayed, despite the bizarre parade unfolding before them, which included the giant tooth, a boa constrictor, syncopatic lighting and a rather jolly executioner and his guillotine.

Finally, though, they were stirred enough to rise by the incongruous vision of Santa Claus giving Alice and the boys his congratulations at show's conclusion.

And when a band member got on all fours behind St. Nick, and Alice gave the perennial do-gooder a shove—followed

by the pummeling of the old man as they dragged him off stage—the stage-fronters roared mightily in approval...

After Gordon had been told by the board members that the Cooper show still could not come to Binghamton on December 29, he went directly to the Binghamton reporters who had been kept out of the meetings. Gordon called the four men “irrational and unprofessional,” and said that the teenagers of Binghamton were being denied the opportunity to see the Cooper show because the arena board wanted to teach the arena manager a lesson. Gordon told the reporters that he had gone out of his way to accommodate the board, allowing them to watch the show from the stage, and “no one ever sits on an Alice Cooper stage... Alice humbled himself for the kids of Binghamton by explaining on an elementary level what the show was about. Alice wasted his time by talking to these men before a show, when all the adrenaline was building, when he normally is preparing himself mentally for a show... If I was a kid living in Binghamton and I was told they approved of the show, but they wouldn’t let it in on the only date the group could appear... this is a big thing in Binghamton. That pressure is going to be released, somehow. It’s going to come out in crime. It’s going to come out in drugs. There’s going to be one kid who possibly goes to drugs. I don’t mean to make it sound that heavy, but all these things come out of frustration... I’m very glad I didn’t grow up in Binghamton.”

All of Gordon’s quotes would appear in the *Binghamton Press* during the next several days. Board chairman Seaman, when the reporters told him of Gordon’s comments, was resentful. “We went in to meet him as gentlemen, had a nice discussion, and left, I thought, with good will,” Seaman said. “They were the ones who asked us to go backstage and meet Cooper, not us.”

Within minutes of learning that the tour could not go to Binghamton this time around, Gordon gave the go-ahead to Dick Klotzman, the promoter, to find another hall for December 29. Klotzman was prepared; he had already made tentative arrangements in Utica. So while the four men from Binghamton were driving back to their homes, to face the various and vehement reactions from the people of their community, we were already assured of playing somewhere else on the date in question.

And Alice? I went up to tell him about the decision when I got back to the hotel. He was in his bathrobe, ready to go to bed. “We’re not going there, huh?” he said. “That’s okay. I never even knew where Binghamton was, anyway.”

He turned to Norm. “Is my beer by the bed, for the morning?” he said.

Norm nodded. Placing Alice’s breakfast beer on the carpet by the bed was one of his nightly duties—and on the last tour, Alice had also required a towel by the bed every night, because he would inevitably wake up vomiting.

“Yeah, it’s there,” Norm said. “You don’t need a towel, too, do you?”

“No,” Alice said. “I haven’t vomited once this tour.”

“That’s because this time you have a bodyguard with personality,” Norm said.

“No, it isn’t,” Alice said. “It’s just that if I vomit, a Polack like you would hear it and try to answer.”

Norm shrieked. The men from Binghamton would be wondering for years whether they had done the right thing, but the tour was already back on keel.

FIFTEEN

Tour life had been so indolently pleasurable and tempting to take for granted that I had not given much thought to the fact that, for me, it would be ending before long. And as soon as I did start to consider that truth, I realized how much I would be missing it when it was over. A life of easy camaraderie and contented perpetual motion was numbing and enjoyable, and the idea of going back to a world where there was more to do than show up on stage once a night did not entice me in the least. Before I had left Chicago to join the band, I had assumed that at some point I would grow sick of it all, and would long for the mundane concerns of daily living as the rest of us know it. But it never happened.

Rather, I began to get more and more used to living by the rules of a traveling rock and roller. At first, I had found myself becoming faintly edgy every day at the trivial small talk and idle wasting away of the hours. But as the tour progressed, I was having to admit to myself that I was *happy* putting in that kind of day, I was *happy* at being able to dawdle time away without feeling guilty. That is what it had been at the beginning: a kind of guilt on my part at sitting in chauffeur-driven limousines and making dull jokes while the rest of the world paid reverence to a time clock. By now, though, I was committed to taking advantage of it while it lasted, and I'm afraid that even I was beginning to regard limousine drivers as slavish automatons whose sole reason for existing was to be there whenever I needed them, and to accept the Starship as a perfectly normal way of getting from one place to the next—if only it wouldn't take so long to rev up the jets engines every day.

Our next show after Syracuse was in Norfolk, Virginia, but when we got to the Syracuse airport, there was a new

difficulty. The private portion of the field where our plane was parked was separated from an access road by a small chain-link fence—and upon our arrival, we found that the gate was locked and that there were no airport personnel in sight to let us in.

I was in the second limousine, with Dennis Dunaway, Cindy Smith, and Glen Buxton. We sat in neutral behind the first car for a minute or two, and then we saw the Amazing Randi get out of the first car, and walk through the winter chill to examine the gate's lock.

"Make the fence disappear, Randi," Dennis called to him. Randi looked at the lock for several minutes, but it remained on the gate.

Shep and Alice emerged from the first car next, to walk over the gravel lot and try their hand at it. "Watch out. Norm," Cindy Smith said quietly in our car. "Alice may be attacked from the rear." And, as if on cue. Norm leaped out of the first car, and ran to Alice's side in the empty lot.

"Don't blink, Norm," Dennis said from our window.

Randi fiddled with the gate some more, to no avail. "Guess he just isn't feeling amazing today," Glen said.

"He'll have some excuse for this one," Cindy said.

"Tf we put him in a strait jacket and handcuffed his arms behind his back and locked him upside down in a tank of water, he'd get out," Dennis said. "But he can't do a padlock in broad daylight."

"He'll tell us that's what the amazing thing is," Cindy said.

Finally, a truck from the airport office pulled up, opened the gate, and we were off. Once again the Starship was cold, and

we wrapped ourselves in yellow wool blankets and watched *Mars Invades Earth* on the videotape TVs while we waited for the engines to start up. “We’re paying a lot of money for this intensive care unit,” Alice said.

The flight to Norfolk was a smooth one, but as we made our approach to the airport, a hard rain spattered against the plane’s windows, and we saw that there was frost on the ground. “Oh, look at that,” Alice said, studied pain and desperation in his voice. “That’s not golf weather. I’m just going to go somewhere where it’s warm after tonight’s show, so I can get some golf in on this tour.”

At the airport, waiting for us in the cold, pelting rain, was a full band playing “The Stars and Stripes Forever,” and a line of pretty girls standing on a red carpet, carrying leis to place around our necks and bottles of champagne to pour for us. This had all been the idea of Dick Klotzman, the same promoter who had been involved in the Binghamton dispute, and who had flown down to Norfolk with us, playing poker with Shep the whole way. Receptions like this one were Klotzman’s way of ingratiating himself with the band, and he was rewarded by getting a profitable number of dates on each tour and occasional personal chatter from the band rather than the mute nods that the Cooper people offered most local promoters. Klotzman was a fanatic about making his shows “special”; for tonight’s performance, he had planned a thousand-dollar catered Hawaiian luau in the dressing room after the concert complete with a pig’s head and dancing girls.

We ran over the red carpet and into the waiting Cadillacs, where Klotzman had arranged for more bottles of champagne to be stored on ice on the back window ledges. Alice poured for all of us in the second car, and we toasted the landscape all the way to the Holiday Inn, across the

street from the beautiful, modernistic Scope Arena, where we would play that evening.

I got my key envelope from Rebecca, and went upstairs to my room. I heard music playing out in the hallway, so I went to take a look. Mike Bruce's door was open. He had his guitar plugged in to a tiny, portable Pignose amplifier, and he was providing a preview concert for a striking young lady who I recognized as one of the lei bearers from the red carpet at the airport. Just another afternoon to kill on the road.

Neal Smith and I were fast becoming good friends, which I would never have bet on. By every outward sign, he possessed all the callous, arrogant, self-centered, infantile traits of pop stardom that I found offensive. When we had landed in Toronto, and Neal had cleared Customs, he had stood by his pile of luggage in the concourse outside the Customs area, waiting for someone to lead him away to our next limousine. But David Libert had been having trouble getting everyone through the lines in quick order, so we were being delayed. Neal and his bags remained in the middle of the corridor traffic, blocking everyone else in the airport who needed to get by. Finally, an airport guard came up to him and said, "Sir, could you please move your suitcases out of the way?" Neal had fumed. He had loudly slammed and kicked the baggage across the hallway, and screamed, "All right, damn it! LIBERT! LIBERT! Damn it, Libert, do something about the fucking bags!" Libert had hurried up and carted Neal's suitcases to safety.

So he had not seemed to be the kind of person I would be drawn to. But soon enough, we began to be thrown together by a pure coincidence of habits: before the shows, each performer had a different preference about how to spend the last few hours. Alice liked to watch TV in his room and putt with Norm. Dennis and Cindy stayed together and talked.

Randi ate a big dinner in the hotel restaurant. Mike Bruce slept. Glen Buxton did whatever it was he did to prepare himself for the evening, behind his locked door.

Neal and I, it turned out, both liked to drink some vodka before going over to the halls. Neither of us could sleep in the time just before getting ready to perform, and so we started going to the hotel barrooms together around six o'clock, and sitting at the bar until it was time for the limousines to take us to the arenas. Before long, we left Libert and Rebecca a standing message: don't bother with one-hour calls to our rooms, or calls just before showtime. Just come to the bar for us, and we'll go from there. It was an easy way to make the nervous pre-performance time go faster. In our rooms, both of us tended to pace the floors waiting for the final call.

As we got to know each other, I found that I was genuinely enjoying Neal's company. True, I still could not fathom some of his public behavior; an outburst like the one in the Toronto airport, which had caused at least one parent in the vicinity to quickly place his hands over his young son's ears, was something that would never cease to seem rude and uncalled for to me. And I would like to be able to report that, in private, Neal was shy and withdrawn and ethereal. But in fact, he was not; the private Neal was pretty much an only slightly lower-keyed extension of the public Neal. He liked to describe himself as the World's Tallest Drummer, as if that intensified his claim to stardom. Of all the members of the band, Neal was the one who took his role as a rock and roll idol the most seriously. Even Alice, whose public persona forced him to act like a full-time star in front of outsiders, was the first to recognize the irony and silliness of it once the crowds were gone. Neal, however, would have nothing of that debunking attitude; with his jewelry and waist-length

blond hair and oil baron’s demeanor, he made even a trip to the cigar stand for a pack of gum into a gaudy performance.

And maybe it was because of his very refusal to be bashful and disavowing of his love for the limelight that we got along so well. He was simply fun to talk with; I never had the feeling that he was holding back, or weighing what he was about to say in case it might make him sound bad. He was almost naive in his enthusiasm and openness, and so we found ourselves going on for hours about a multitude of subjects, for Neal felt that his success with the Cooper band made him an automatic authority on anything from politics to space flight. I, too, tended to become somewhat full of philosophy and wide-ranging expertise after I’d been at the bar long enough, and by showtime every night we would be calling for more drinks and talking at each other at the approximate rate of a thousand words a minute and generally providing vivid and highly audible entertainment for the other patrons of the hotel lounge. Neal and I never ran out of things to talk about; we were coming from two completely different sets of life experiences, and the conversations were likely to shift from what it was like to perform for the first time in Paris to what it was like to sit in the Watergate Committee hearing room, and we would stop only when Libert would appear in the doorway to signal that the limousines were ready to go.

As I lay around the motel room in Norfolk on the afternoon of the show, I leafed through a rock and roll fan magazine I had picked up at the newsstand. The magazine had a poetry section, open to contributions from the young readers. I glanced at some of the poems, and then I came to one that was dedicated to Neal. As I read the poem, I began to smile, and then to laugh aloud; the poem was signed by one “Gemini II,” of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, but it came so close to Neal’s own image of himself that I was harboring a serious

suspicion that he had composed it in his room back home, and had sent it to the magazine’s editor:

TO N.S.

White satin shines
As the lights stream
Down, illuminating
This glorious figure
As he sits.

Tense and waiting
At the helm
Of the drums.
Then The show has begun.
A single powerful
Stroke signals that
This is what
You've waited for.

He's a master.
The sound of his hands
Commanding the drums
Brings you higher
Your body moves
With each beat.

He drives you frantic.
But he's in control.

Like a god,
He's oblivious
To the many who
Thrill to just
The sight of him.

His eyes are cold,

Revealing nothing,
Yet he's warm.

A toss of his head and your eyes delight
To the sudden flash
Of long gleaming Hair.
A shower of Pure gold.
And Your tension builds.
Then, almost as
Soon as it's begun,
It's over.

He rises. He smiles.
He says nothing.
But he knows.
You take in every inch
Of his majestic form.
He's a beautiful man.
Your heart pounds
Faster just to Look at him.
You leave him.

Or is it he who leaves You?
And in the Morning, you could
Almost cry.
Though you loved
Every second, you
Know how you wanted
To touch him So badly.
God, how you wanted
To touch him.

I was rereading the poem and thinking that Neal would find nothing overstated or excessive about it at all when the telephone rang, and who should it be but the old white satin glorious master of the drums himself. “Come on down to the room if you want,” he said. “Babette’s in the bathroom

setting her hair, and the football games are all boring." So I walked on over to his room, and Neal and I resumed our continuing colloquy.

I told Neal that I had been wondering about something: he took so easily to the staggering success of the Alice Cooper band that it was hard to imagine him leading any other kind of life. But what if he had not been so lucky? What if things had not worked out so well? What had he planned on doing if the group had not made it?

"I know it's hard to believe," Neal said. "But I always knew that one day I'd be doing the thing that's happening now. I never had any doubt in my mind that I'd have this kind of success. When we first got out of high school, Alice and Glen and I were in the same basic design class at Glendale Community College, in Arizona, and I knew it even then.

"In sixty-seven, when we had moved to California to try to make it big, and we weren't getting anywhere, I remember that the Who were in town for a concert, and so was Cream. The other guys all wanted to go see those shows, but I wouldn't even go. Because it would frustrate me too much to sit in the audience and watch it. It would have been like seeing a ghost up there on the stage, because I knew that it should be me up there, being a star.

"I used to do lawn work and gardening in the daytime in California, to make some money, because the band wasn't making any. I can still see myself crawling around on my knees on some lady's front lawn, clipping the goddamn grass, getting blisters and blood all over my hands, and thinking to myself, 'Keep it up, keep it up, you're going to make it soon.' And then we met Shep and Joe, and it started. A guy named Herbie Cohen had wanted to manage us, but he already had Frank Zappa, and we didn't want to be

second to nobody in the world. Shep and Joe were going to work only for us, they didn't have any other acts.

"The first time that Alice and Glen and Dennis and Mike and I sat down with Shep and Joe, they told us everything we wanted to hear. It was really like a formal business meeting. They said that there were groups making it every day, and that some groups made it fast and then faded away, but some lasted a long time. They said that they knew how to plan it. We all agreed at that meeting to stick it out and stay together until we were all millionaires. I remember, we were so hyped up, the five of us said, 'Yeah, we'll stick it out until we're millionaires, even if it takes a fuckin' year, we'll stick it out.' But it didn't really start to happen for us until Seventy-two, after four years with Shep.

"The way we figured it, there were four or five thousand bands in L.A., all over the city, and they were all trying to be the one to make it big. So we knew we had to do something different. That's why we started on the stuff that became so famous. You gotta admit, say anything else you want to about it, but it was different. We thought about Dylan, the way he started out, as kind of an underground type, and we related to that. Let the word spread, make people talk about you and hear rumors about you. We were willing to try anything. We weren't making it on the West Coast, so we tried a nationwide tour, and it wasn't too good either, but they seemed to like us in Detroit. So we picked up and moved from California to Detroit. We were going to go wherever it looked like we had a chance. And finally it started to work."

I said that of all the performers I watched on the stage every night, he was the one who seemed to enjoy what he was doing the most. Mike Bruce was steady and professionally exuberant, and Alice was Alice, but Neal, sitting behind his

drums, seemed to be in a different universe from the rest of them. They were all doing a job—but Neal alone looked as if he was in a state of ecstasy, of unbridled, runaway rapture. There were nights when I would see him pounding away at his drum kit, smashing and bouncing and shaking, and I would think that he had gone clean out of his head, right over the edge, so wrapped up in it was he.

I asked him if he could verbalize what it felt like for him during a show.

“That’s my whole life, right there,” Neal said. “It’s such a high... walking out on stage in the darkness, and then walking behind the amps and going up there behind my drums... you get a tingle... I’ve been working backstage with my sticks, to get my fingers loose, and then I work around the drums one time, to see that they’re in place. That’s the first burst of energy, and WHEW!!! I do that, and then I sink myself down into the pocket, and I’m on stage, man, I’m there.

“On stage I can be as mean as I want to be, I can make whatever image for myself that I feel like. It’s my own kingdom, and no one can take it away from me. I can do anything. I know that they say you can feel powerful when you’re playing the guitar on stage. But on the drums—when you’re pushing the whole group, it’s incredible! So fucking powerful! Just hitting the shit out of those drums, and feeling the whole stage shaking beneath me... Jesus Christ, you know, there’s nothing like it, I can’t even tell you!...”

Neal’s reverie was interrupted by the sound of water being shut off in the bathroom. I had forgotten that Babette was in there doing her hair, and I recalled that when I had first met the band several years before, Neal had been single—and had been full of sexual braggadocio and tales of conquest. Now he seemed to be a model husband, brimming over with

concern and solicitude; if his standard personality was that of a rock and roll Jack the Ripper, around Babette he was transformed into Ozzie Nelson. I asked him how he had met her.

“It was luck,” he said. “I do promotional work for the Premier Drum Company, and they wanted to use me in an advertisement. So I talked to them about what kind of picture we wanted to use in the ad, and I said that I wanted to show the mansion—that’s when we were all living in the same big house—and the drums, and my Rolls-Royce, and a really beautiful model. So for a model, they sent out Babette. She’d just turned eighteen, she’d just come to New York from modeling in Europe. She shows up for the job, you know, and she walks into my room. I’m always cool, so I don’t show anything, but inside I’m going BOOOOOIUNG! Later on, after we had started to go out with each other, she tells me that she about died when she first saw me, too. She went home to her roommates, and she said, ‘I just met my husband.’ We’ve been married since August.

“We had a civil ceremony in the Greenwich town hall. We haven’t really told anybody outside the group. We’re kind of keeping it quiet so that we can have a public ceremony later that’ll get a lot of publicity. We’re both so tall, you know, and the idea is, she’d be wearing a tux, and I’d be in a full-length wedding gown. Great pictures, huh?

“I’ll tell you, it’s really a solid feeling, being married. I don’t miss fucking around at all. I don’t feel as lame-brained as I used to. You’re always looking for the ultimate person, and I never would have done it if I didn’t think it was perfect. I was tired of chicks on the road, anyway. Michael Bruce, he still does all of that he can. I don’t know what it is with him. I used to do groupies every night, but Michael is still into that. I wonder why he does it? Maybe it’s some kind of need to

prove to himself that he can fuck whoever he wants, you know? Or maybe he just likes fucking. I remember once, in Texas, he had arranged to meet two girls down there, and they both showed up, so Mike got two different hotel rooms and put one of them in each, and he kept switching back and forth all night. Neither girl ever knew what was going on, either. I'm through with that, though. I haven't done it since I got married, and I don't plan to. I know that everyone says that, but I mean it."

I asked Neal what he thought he would be doing in ten years.

"I don't know," he said. "Alice is doing all this talking about flicks. Well, I'm interested in movies too. Don't know if I'd be any good at it. Maybe I'd be a lousy actor. I guess I'll see. I really dig Clint Eastwood. I'd like to do stuff like that. But when I think about the future, I don't think about working, because if I don't want to, I'll never have to work again after this is over. I think about how I'll want to be living.

"When I was living in California, I had a picture above my bed, in my room. Most people have pictures of girls or other people or something, right? Well, I only had that one picture, and it was of a Rolls-Royce. I'd look at it every night before I went to sleep. And now I have my Rolls. So now I'm always looking for a personal valet sort of person. I've been looking for the right guy for a long time. Drive my car. Be my flunky. Do everything for me. But if you let them get to be your friend, then they get too close, it's no good. If my valet wants to talk to me, then he's the wrong person for the job. He should just drive the car. I want to get rid of my Silver Cloud and get the Rolls Phantom limousine, and let my valet drive me around in that.

"I don't feel guilty at all about wanting that kind of thing. If other groups want to talk about doing free concerts, and

supporting political things, fine, if that's the kind of people they're made of. But I'm a total American and a capitalist at heart. I like the decadence, the cars, the fur coats. Even in Nazi Germany, before the war, they were really decadent too, they were really interesting. I see these other groups talking about being one of 'the people,' and that's just not what I am. If a person likes to listen to free music, let him turn on his radio. But if that person wants to get into a hall and see a star, man, then he's going to pay for it, because that's what being a star's all about.

"I've looked at houses that have cost up to four million dollars. I like so many things. I admit it, I'm hung up on materialism. George Harrison can make an album called *Living in the Material World*, like he doesn't approve of it, but that's easy for him to say. Howard Hughes could have made that album. If the kids are going to accept George Harrison putting down materialism, fine. For me, it's not just the idea of being a rich businessman, that's not enough. What matters is being a decadent, arrogant star. That's what makes you an interesting person. If there's a shortage of energy, not enough gas? Great, I want the biggest house, I want twenty cars. That's an interesting person."

Since the arena was directly across the street from the motel, I walked over to look around early in the evening. Shep and David Libert were both there. "Watch out for Gordon," Libert said. "He's in a foul mood. The stage isn't here. Nicky's truck again."

Shep looked relatively calm, so I asked him if he was cooling off. "Not at all," he said. "I'm just so furious that I'm beyond anger. I've never been so furious, as a matter of fact. I think I'm going to have to fire Nicky. It's too bad, because he's a good guy, but he didn't follow instructions. He decided to

drive another route, and he didn’t check with us, and now he’s not going to make it to the show.”

Libert shook his head. “This is the third straight day he’s driving with no sleep,” he said. “He can’t think straight. He’s got to go to bed some time, or he’s going to go out of his mind.”

As we talked, the doors were opened to the public, and among the first members of the audience into the hall were two women in their twenties, both carrying children of three or four. I went up to talk to them. They both lived near Norfolk, they both were separated from their husbands, and they both wanted their babies to see the show.

“Aren’t they a little young?” I asked one of the women, whose name was Alma and who had brown hair on one side of a center part, blond hair on the other side.

“Yeah, but they love Alice,” she said. “I’ve got cotton for their ears.”

She picked up her son, and held him in front of my face. “Sing your favorite song. Tommy,” she said.

The little boy smiled at me. “Dead babies, can’t take care of themselves...” he sang.

I prayed for a minute or two, then went back to the hotel. I knocked on Alice’s door, and Norm said to come on in, “Columbo” was just starting. I sat down in front of the television set, and told Alice about the women and the babies, and the song.

“God, I know,” he said. “It’s horrible. It happens to me all the time. Mothers come up to me with their kids and say, ‘Sing it,’ and it’s always ‘Dead Babies.’ I never know what to say. Everyone has to have this black humor, they think it’s

necessary. I look at these little children, and I think, 'No, no, that's not what I had in mind when I wrote it, let them learn nursery rhymes.'"

Norm called to me from one of the other rooms in the suite. "Could you come in here?" he said. "I have something I want to show you." When I came through the door, he pulled me aside and whispered, "Alice doesn't know yet about the stage not being here. I just didn't want you to let it out. Shep's on his way up to tell him."

So we went back to "Columbo." Alice gestured at one of the guest stars: "Robert Culp, he's my favorite actor. He's so casual, he makes it seem like he's not even acting. You can just study him and learn by watching."

In a few minutes, Shep entered the room, glum in the face for Alice's benefit.

"How's it going?" Alice said.

Shep shook his head.

"Is the stage up?" Alice said.

Shep didn't answer.

"The stage isn't here?" Alice said.

"No," Shep said. "The truck's still on the road."

"Will it be here?" Alice said.

"Not if we want to go on at any reasonable time," Shep said.

Alice tossed an empty beer can at a wastebasket across the room. "That's three nights in a row, Shep," he said. "That just takes the wind right out of our sails."

“I know,” Shep said. “I’m afraid I’m going to have to let one of the truck drivers go. I hate to do it, because his mistakes wouldn’t have mattered if the weather wouldn’t have been so bad. But I can’t take a chance on having it happen again.”

And so ended the Alice Cooper career of Nicky Brazell, the young trucker who never before had been so happy with a job. For him, there would be no more chills in the middle of the night at the thought of not making it to the next town, and letting the band down. The next day, a new driver appeared on the room lists, and Nicky’s name was not mentioned again.

SIXTEEN

Even without the stage, the Norfolk show was a brash, stomping rocker, easily the best performance musically of the tour, and all hands were in supreme spirits in the dressing room afterwards. Larry Hitchcock rushed in and said, “The crew sends its regards. You guys are a pleasure to work with.” And then the roadies all came through the door, and we stood and applauded them. Later, back at the hotel, the roadies were told to stop by Alice’s room, and when they arrived he gave each of them a bottle of Mateus or champagne. It was a strange way to be spending the Christmas season, but on this night everyone was happy with the world.

Norfolk was also the top night of the tour in terms of the abundance of available women. Because our motel was such a short walk from the arena, the hallways were crammed with girls, so much so that the police came in with dogs in an effort to clear the place. They failed miserably. Due to the fact that we had been performing on such a sparse stage, the crew didn’t have much to pack up, and they were back at the Holiday Inn early. They would go to Alice’s room, pick up their wine, and then grab a couple of strays on their way down the hall. The most common sight of the night was that of a tour person heading for his room with two, three, or four girls in tow.

I was in Alice’s room just before the roadies came back from the arena, and we could hear the noise of dozens of girls wandering around the hallway, waiting for someone to nod their way. Alice did not budge from his chair by the television. I had not seen him with a girl at all during the tour, although he certainly could have had his choice of thousands. On the days when Cindy Lang was on the road, he was with her constantly, but when she was gone he

rejected every advance that came his way from the stage door and hotel women. I asked him about it.

“I don’t fuck at all on the road any more,” he said. “I told Cindy, I’ll never bring her home the clap. I just don’t do it. Right now, I like the idea of her and me trusting each other. I know I’m on the road all the time, but I really do trust her. I think that if I found out that she was with someone who I knew, I’d just laugh. Fucking groupies is so old. You could do it every night, there’re always girls available. But if you’re going to go to bed with one of them, that means that there’s a whole stack of stories you have to listen to. At this point, I don’t want to hear the stories of any of these girls’ lives any more. But anyway, the truth is, when I get done with the show at night I’m so exhausted I probably couldn’t even get it up.”

Sex on the rock and roll road is a subject of some curiosity on the part of the general public. In the late 1960s, *Time* magazine informed the nation of the existence of groupies, and ever since then even the most Andy Williams-loving Rotarian has known that unspeakable things tend to go on at rock hotels. On the tour, whenever I would make telephone calls to friends around the country, inevitably the first thing they would ask about was the groupies. If a forty-five-year-old father of teenage rock and roll fans could not understand what the music was all about, if he was not aroused by the thought of loud guitars, dope-filled arenas and glittery clothing, there was at least one part of the rock world that secretly sparked his interest—and that was the idea of easy, indiscriminate sex with willing young girls. Of all the many parts of the American dream that rock and roll touched, this was the one that attracted almost universal envy. The president of a giant steel company could share almost all of the other advantages and prerogatives of a rock superstar, but if that company president had to make an

out-of-town trip, and wanted female companionship, he would have to take pains to arrange it for himself, and he could presumably fail. On a rock and roll tour, that was not the case; women were simply always there, and they were the pursuers.

Rock and roll travelers spent a lot less time thinking about groupies than did people who only knew about the phenomenon by reading about it—for the same reason that a man who sits by a water cooler in his office spends a lot less time thinking about thirst than does a person who is lost in the desert. It was a given; if there was going to be a concert, then there were going to be girls after the concert. The only question was one of quality, and, fittingly enough, the people on the Cooper tour gave about as much thought to how enticing the girls would be in the next city as they did to how good the hotel restaurant would be. There was going to be food, and there were going to be women.

The Cooper tour did not live up to its perverted image in the sex department; there were no open orgies, no public whippings, no bondage in the party suites. For one thing, Alice never hit on girls, Neal was traveling with Babette, and Dennis was with Cindy Smith every night. So whatever womanizing was done was done primarily by tour people who were not in the five-man band. With more than thirty men on the road, there were still plenty of beds for the hallway ladies to sleep in, but it tended to be fairly private, and not circus-like. When I had been reporting on a tour by Rod Stewart and the Faces several years before, there had been a night when a young girl had been hanging around one of the band members' rooms after a concert, willing to go off with whatever musician wanted her. But no one had been in the mood for that; too conventional. Instead, Stewart and the four Faces had stripped her clothes off and, in succession, had jammed bars of soap, motel room keys, a

banana, and the banana peel up inside of her. They had recorded the entire scene on a portable videotape camera. The girl had seemed to accept the entire incident as good, clean fun, and had laughed about it after the group had become bored with gorging her.

The Cooper tour was not like that; if promiscuity was a way of life, public sex was not. The sexual atmosphere was, you might say, a bit casual. To break the tedium, the tour party divided up into teams, and David Libert would announce the "ball scores" on the Starship every day, keeping a running total until the trip ended. The attitude toward girls was probably best expressed in a conversation that took place in a motel room just before the show one night. "How many times you been fucked since the beginning of the tour?" one Cooper traveler asked another. The other stroked his chin thoughtfully, and then replied:

"Let's see, Nashville yes, Greensboro no—wait—Nashville yes, Greensboro no, Madison yes, Ann Arbor yes, Toledo, let me think, I'm trying to remember what my room looked like there, Toledo I got blown, Toronto yes..."

If the concept of groupies was unsettling to much of adult America, then the reality of sex on the tour would have been far more upsetting. For the great majority of the girls who ended up sleeping with tour people were *not* standard groupies—they did not consider themselves as such, they did not hang around backstage areas, they did not make a habit of haunting motel corridors. Rather, they had simply gone to the concert, got turned on by the show and the music, and decided that it might be a kick to see if they could get into the hotel and meet some people from the tour, just to find out what it was like. They would then discover that it was very easy indeed, that the people from the show treated them civilly enough—and before long they

would decide that it would put an unexpected and enjoyable end to their night at the concert hall if they went to bed with this guy they had just met. There was an aura of visceral excitement and anything's okay surrounding the tour, and it was not at all unusual to find two girls, who in their lives had slept only with their steady boyfriends, now taking off their clothes in front of each other and climbing into bed together with a man from the Cooper tour. Nomally they would never think of such three-way shenanigans, but it seemed like it might be fun, and anyway, no one would ever know, the tour was leaving town in the morning.

To the tour people, then, easy sex was simply one more job benefit, although a very pleasant one, and they were happy to accept it as that and not make an especially big deal out of it. It was like the pornographic movies that were constantly on the Starship screen. They were a part of this kind of life, and did not call for comment. They appeared on the screen every morning, and we sat down and watched them with our orange juice. Larry Hitchcock, the tour's deep thinker, was looking at *Give Me A Sailor* one morning, and he said, "God, I'm glad that I grew up when there was still a little mystery and discovery to sex. I'm so jaded now... this being on the road gets you so jaded about women." But mostly, it was not analyzed. It was just *there*, and to discuss it seriously would have been as pointless as discussing the fact that we were young men wearing blue jeans in the back seats of Cadillac limousines. The luxury living was part of the rock and roll life, and so was sleeping with girls who had not even bothered to say what their names were. Young girls knew that they were *supposed* to behave that way around rock and rollers; it was like the big-busted, nineteen-year-old college girl who approached some tour people outside the hotel elevator one night just as we were returning from a show. She smiled, said hi, and very matter of factly let it be known that she had never had a boy come between her

breasts before, and that she would be more than happy to give it a try. Later, it turned out that not only was she not a regular groupie, she also wasn't even a fan. She had not been at the concert. She was staying at the hotel with her parents, and she had overheard one of the desk clerks say something about the bills for the Alice Cooper rooms. She did not especially like Alice Cooper's records, but she had never been around a big-time rock and roll band before, and this seemed like as good a time as any to try out her fantasy, so she waited for us to arrive from the arena. It would make a good story for the girls back at school after winter vacation.

Normally, these midnight encounters were carried off decorously enough that no one knew the details of them until story swapping time the next day on the Starship. But in Norfolk there was a small emergency. One of our roadies stopped by David Libert's room, where there was a crowded party going on. The roadie took three girls away with him and got into bed. Before long he decided that he didn't want to cope with all three of them.

So, undressed, he ran out into the hallway, saw another member of the stage crew, and motioned for him to come in. The second roadie entered the room, saw the girls, took his clothes off, and jumped into bed with them.

Later, the first roadie determined that it was too hot in the room. Being less than sober-minded at the time, he immediately smashed his hand through the window to let some air in. In the process, he opened a long, deep gash in his wrist.

One of the girls called Libert's room, and said, "David, you'd better get down here, someone's hurt pretty seriously." Libert ran to the roadie's room, and found all five people sitting on the floor, naked. The first roadie had been in

charge of keeping the boa constrictor for the night, and had let it out to crawl around and play. When Libert arrived, the roadie was dripping blood all over the snake. Libert ordered the other four out, and called the police to take the roadie to the hospital. The roadie had wanted to go by himself in a limousine, but Libert's reasoning was that, for a transient longhair in Norfolk, Virginia, the odds on getting good, prompt service at the emergency room would be vastly improved by the presence of a police escort.

In the morning, I saw Libert in the motel lobby. "When I got back to my room, the three chicks were there," he said. "I told them, I guess you need a place to sleep,' and they said yeah, they did. The party had broken up by this time, so I looked at them, and I said, 'You two, get in that other bed,' and to the most presentable one I said, 'You're sleeping here with me.' She said, 'Okay, David, anything you say.' I could have freaked with all three of them, they would have done anything, but I just wanted to get off and go to sleep. They left real early this morning, I don't even remember if they woke me up to say they were going."

Libert gazed off into space, and then summed up the entire traveling party's tender, sentimental approach to romance:

"That's so nice, when they leave right away."

Alice and Norm left Norfolk for Jacksonville, Florida, well before noon; we had a two-day break before our next show, and since the Starship was scheduled to fly north, Alice took a commercial flight south instead, toward golfing weather. The rest of us rode the limousines through a snowstorm to the airport, from where we were scheduled to fly to Baltimore. The upcoming show was in the Capital Centre, a brand-new, twenty thousand-seat arena between Washington and Baltimore, in Largo, Maryland. There was airplane trouble again—-this time, something had struck the

tail during the night, and the ensuing hole had to be welded, plus the Shell fuel truck was wallowing in the mud fifty yards from the Starship, plus a primer truck needed to start the jet engines had mysteriously not appeared on time—and Libert tried to find out how long we were going to be sitting in Virginia. While he inquired, the field was declared closed until four p.m. because of the weather.

“Look, we’ve got to get out of here,” Libert said to a supervisor at the airport. “We’ve got a fifty-thousand-dollar engagement riding on whether we get there on time, you’ve got to open that runway up for us.” It was not true, of course; we could have waited forty-eight more hours and still made it to the next show on time.

“I’d rather get us out of here than listen to everybody whine about the delay,” Libert said to me. “I have a feeling it’ll be easier to get them to open the runway for us than to explain to the band that we have to wait for three hours.”

Libert and I waited in our own limousine while the airport man made some calls. I told David about my conversation with Neal the previous afternoon, and about Neal’s dream to hire his own valet-flunky.

“Neal wants a flunky, does he?” Libert said. “He’d better watch out, or he’ll end up selling shoes for a living, he’ll be other people’s flunky. He’s making a lot of money, but do you think Shep Gordon is going to be Neal Smith’s manager forever? One of these days Neal’s going to be on his own, and it’ll take some sharp hustler about ten minutes to get Neal involved in a flimflam plan, and then he’ll be back to where he started.”

The airport man ran through the snow to our limousine. He had received authorization to open up the runway just long

enough for us to take off. We boarded the plane quickly, and were in the air in short order.

“Anyone have any grass?” a roadie called out as soon as we were off.

“Yeah, we’re allowed to smoke now that our mother’s not on the plane, aren’t we?” came another voice.

Mick Mashbir, the hired guitarist, sat across from me at one of the plane’s card tables. Mick had the fragile, pretty good looks of an idol of the ten-year-olds; he would have been perfect as a David Cassidy type. “Why didn’t you go to Florida and play golf with Alice?” he asked.

I said that I didn’t play golf, and that I thought I’d just hang around the hotel in Maryland for a few days, read some magazines and sleep, and see some friends in Washington. I asked him why he hadn’t gone with Alice.

“I wasn’t invited,” he said. “I wasn’t one of the chosen few on the invitation list.”

On the TV screens, a videotape of Paul McCartney’s 1973 television special was showing. Here we were, nearly ten years later—just about all of us were fifteen or sixteen years old when the Beatles had first appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show on February 9, 1964, and the sight of the screamers in the Sullivan audience was one of the major spurs that goaded the five Cooper musicians to first pick up their instruments, as Arizona high school boys. The Beatles, it had seemed then, were the most exciting, thrilling thing that had happened in years. The idea of seeing them in person had been a dream; the thought of living their kind of life did not even occur, of course, because they were not even human, they had nothing in common with the rest of us. I remember watching them on TV in Columbus, watching as

McCartney leaned into the microphone and began his first song, “All My Loving,” and I remember the telephone ringing that night, all my friends calling all their friends, wanting to know “did you see it?” For weeks we could talk about nothing else at Bexley High School; here, finally, was something to fill our fantasies. The same thing was going on all over the country. And now here we were, a rock and roll generation later, hopping around America on the Starship in the middle of a million-dollar tour—we were living the dream, and there, on our video monitors, was an older, no longer thrilling Paul McCartney. This McCartney on the screen was not so much a rock and roller as a smooth, mellow balladeer; he sang harmless, peppy little love songs, he was a jolly crooner. McCartney’s electronic image smiled peacefully out at us, and he sang, “I’m a bluebird, I’m a bluebird…”

Neal Smith sneered back at the television, and sang: “You’re a turkey, you’re a turkey.”

We landed in a Baltimore blizzard, and began the two-day wait for showtime.

Late one afternoon, I went to call on Dennis Dunaway and Cindy Smith. “Call on” is the right term; Dennis and Cindy were the tour’s private couple, and I would have never thought to just barge in on them and see what was up. The tour was very informal in that sense, and I didn’t hesitate to knock on Alice’s or Neal’s or Mike’s door if the day was beginning to drag. But with Dennis and Cindy it was different. They did not hang out much with the others, and so I called them first and asked if it would be okay to come by and say hello.

Not that they were unfriendly; far from it, they were so courteous and polite that people from outside the tour sometimes thought that Dennis was putting them on by

acting so gracious and interested. It was just that of all the Cooper performers, Dennis was the one who was completely innocent of any trace of rock and roll decadence. He was the prototypical nice young man, and he would have seemed far more at home hosting a television kiddie program than participating in the nightly gore of the Billion Dollar Babies show. Cindy allowed herself flashes of temper, especially when the Amazing Randi's non-stop chattering got on her nerves; she was, after all, Neal's sister. But I had never heard Dennis raise his voice, much less curse; the naughtiest thing I had seen him do was to play a doctored tape, featuring Richard Nixon's voice admitting guilt in the Watergate scandal, on his cassette recorder. Gripping his bass guitar on stage, Dennis was ebullient enough to fit in with the other Coopers. But as soon as the show was over every night, he reverted to his quiet, Certified Public Accountant personality, and I found myself remembering to use good manners whenever I was around him.

When I came into their room, they were eating room service sandwiches and listening to music. Dennis asked me how I had been liking my experience as a performer, what I thought of the Starship, if I was going stir-crazy in one motel room after another. I felt that he was trying to make me feel at home, and I was searching for a way to get the conversation off me, and onto him. I asked him if he could remember when he had first realized that there was such a thing as rock and roll.

"Let me see," Dennis said. "It was in grade school, I think. That's right, I was in elementary school, and one weekend I went to see the movie *Peter Pan*. It was at our local theater, and before the movie, Duane Eddy and his Rockin' Rebels came out on stage, live. They were from around where we were, and I guess that's why the movie theater people had them at the show. Anyway, do you remember Duane Eddy,

all those instrumentals that he used to do? He came out on stage with his guitar, and he went, ‘DEER- DEER- DEER- DEER- DEER- DEER,’ and it was the first time I ever heard music that loud! It was so exciting!

“That night I went home, and I couldn’t even think about *Peter Pan*, I just remembered how cool Duane Eddy had looked up on stage. I stood on the driveway and pretended to be playing a guitar, strumming my fingers, and I was shouting, ‘DEER- DEER- DEER- DEER- DEER- DEER.’ It made me feel like going on stage right then. But I was just a little kid, and it took the Beatles to get me into it. That’s when all of us first got together, for that lettermen’s club talent show. All we did was take the tunes to Beatles songs, and put fake lyrics to them, like ‘Last night I ran four laps for my coach.’ It was supposed to be a big joke. But look what happened.”

I told Cindy that I had talked to her brother Neal about what all the success meant to him, and that he had seemed to hunger for even more trappings of glory. Since she had been with the band all along—first as Neal’s sister and Dennis’s girlfriend, then as the costume designer, now as the on-stage dancing tooth—I wondered how she was reacting to all the accoutrements of fancy living that had finally come to the group.

“I think it’s not necessary,” she said. “I think that Dennis and I have our own idea of what success is, and I think we tend to be a little more realistic about it. The first time I felt that we’d really made it is when we could open our first savings account.”

I asked Dennis about the squabbles that I had seen erupting in the group. It all seemed to come down to one thing—Alice’s growing personal prominence, and the fading away of the others into the background. I had never heard Dennis talk about this, and I wasn’t surprised, because he didn’t

seem to be one to bitch in public. But I wondered—was his ego involved in this conflict too? Did he resent gradually becoming merely a backup musician for Alice?

Dennis sat on his bed, and didn't respond for a moment. He looked over at Cindy. Then he began to talk.

"Sometimes things look like they aren't so good," he said. "When that happens, I think of all the nice things that have happened to us, and I think back on the times when we didn't have anything. But yes, there's sort of a battle going on between ourselves now. I know you've seen it. The problem is, all of us in the group know how it was supposed to be when we first planned everything—and we know how it's turned out, which is a completely different way. One afternoon, the Amazing Randi and I were walking around some city that we were in, and he took me into a record store. You know how fast Randi talks, and he was talking that way, and he said to the lady behind the counter, 'This is a guitar player in the Alice Cooper group.' And I guess the woman didn't understand him, she just heard him say the words 'Alice Cooper,' because she pulled out the album and said, 'Oh, yes, Alice Cooper. He has a new album. Have you seen it?' And she hands the album to me. My own album.

"Now sure, I get my feelings hurt by something like that. I would have liked to buy that album, and pull out the sleeve and show that lady the picture, and say, 'Look, there's five of us in the group, I made that album.' But I didn't, I'm not like that.

I would have chosen not to have Randi even introduce me. But sometimes I think about it, and I figure that we overlooked one thing: we gave the public too much credit. We expected them to realize that Alice was both things, the person and the group, but they don't realize it."

I told him that he seemed so normal and so down to earth, that he was the only person in the group I could imagine ever living a regular day-to-day working life. I asked him if he felt like a rock and roll star.

“Mainly just when I’m on stage,” he said. “When I’m playing, or when I hear my songs on the radio. The two things that really make me feel that way is when a new record comes out and you hear it for the first time on the car radio, or when you go on stage and hear the people cheer for you. I guess what you mean is how I act around the fans. I’m not a person who wants a lot of strangers around me. Some of the other guys, they’re happy when people they’ve never met come to their room and act like they’re old friends or something. But I think that’s real odd. I feel funny when someone I’ve never met starts calling me ‘Dennis’ and assuming that he should act close to me. That makes me feel uncomfortable. So Cindy and I kind of stick to ourselves.

“Alice isn’t like me. He can talk to anybody, it seems. Even in high school, Alice was unusual. Alice would sit around, and people would listen to him talk. They wouldn’t listen to me. If people come up to me and ask me a question, I’ll give them some dull, expected answer. But Alice is real good at saying interesting things.”

“You shouldn’t talk like that, Dennis,” Cindy said. “You have good ideas.”

“Well, we all brainstorm,” Dennis said. “But Alice, he’s special.”

I asked him about the violence. He seemed to be such a passive, sensitive person; did he ever give any thought to what he was participating in on stage every night?

“I just don’t think people should take it so seriously,” he said. “It’s only tongue-in-cheek, you know. Look at a football game on TV. They’re doing much more violence than we do on stage. We’re not really hurting anyone, and they are.

“Everyone talks about ‘Dead Babies,’ but that was around as a song even before we called ourselves Alice Cooper. We knew a lady who didn’t take care of her kids, and that’s why we wrote the song. The stage act was just an idea about how we should act it out. I think people analyze it too much. It’s fun to go out and scare kids. It’s just like putting on a monster face. It’s, no more serious than that, really.

“I know that some of the other guys in the group are beginning to get down on Alice because he’s becoming so big. But I want to say some good things about him. For one thing, he can sing a lot better than he used to. For such a skinny little guy, he really shouts the songs out now. Alice is the focal point for the thirty-five or forty people who work for the group. There’s two sides to it. We make the show go, and that lets Alice do his theatrics. He’s really special, you know. He’s really one of a kind.”

“You’re just as special as Alice, Dennis,” Cindy said. “You have just as much to say.”

Dennis shrugged, then said nothing. The silence stretched to a minute or so, and finally I asked him what he was thinking.

“I was just thinking about what it used to be like, before we got so popular,” he said. “I remember when our first album, *Pretties for You*, came out. No one had ever heard of us, no one was buying it. But, boy, we had an album. The day that record came out, we thought the Beatles were listening to it. We were so young.”

On the afternoon of the Capital Centre show, I was walking down the hallway of our motel, carrying a white plastic ice bucket from my room, searching for an ice machine. As I passed Alice's door, I noticed three pretty, squeaky-clean-looking young girls of about fourteen, the kind who used to appear in network situation comedies as the cute, bratty kid sisters who would regularly extort a quarter from big sis's boyfriend as a bribe to go out of the house and catch a movie on a Saturday afternoon. These girls in the motel were sitting on the floor outside Alice Cooper's room, and as I approached them, one called to me, "Is that the bucket?"

Another of the girls tried to grab the ice bucket from my hand, and she said, "I know that's the bucket!"

I bravely held my ground and retained the ice container. "What bucket?" I asked.

"We heard Alice was going to pass around a bucket at the show tonight, and have the audience spit in it, and then he was going to take the bucket back and drink it all down," the first girl said. "Do you think he'd let us in if we knocked on his door?"

I tried without success to convince the girls that it was not true, but they would not be swayed. They said they wanted to make their way to the front of the arena tonight, so they could be sure to get their spit into the bucket, and thus down Alice's gullet. Alice, just back from twenty-seven holes of golf in Florida, was in the room fretting because it was not three o'clock yet, and he was consumed by a craving to see "The New Price Is Right" *now*, without sitting through the rest of the soap operas. The girls waited all afternoon, but did not get a chance to see him; they left for the hall around dinnertime, and when we arrived on stage just after nine thirty I saw them right there, at the front of the undulating swarm of bodies.

There was a novelty at the concert this evening. The Capital Centre was trying out a new closed-circuit television gimmick. It worked like this: two cameramen were positioned directly in front of the stage, inside the barricade. Their pictures were fed to a control panel, where a director chose which shot he wanted to use. High up in the arena, a huge, four-sided screen was suspended from the ceiling. On each of the sides of the hanging box, the color TV image appeared. From deep in the hall, the effect was that of watching a live show on the stage and simultaneously seeing a close-up TV version on the screen. The idea intrigued Alice; for the first time on the tour, he seemed genuinely excited to be on stage, and he carefully played to the cameras, leering and grimacing at them, bending close to the lenses, making sure never to wander out of the cameramen's range. His response to the electronic trickery was pure Cooper; many another band, in their effort to remain "natural" and ice-cool, would have ignored the cameras and put on the same show as any other night. But Alice's undisguised fascination with his new toy worked out perfectly, providing a marvelous visual show for even the ticket buyers up in the most distant crannies of the gargantuan concert hall. And the video device was fun; I found myself looking at the big screens more than I was the live show, and when I came on to do my bit, I became so involved with seeing myself up on the screen that I forgot what I was doing, and wandered forward on the stage in a trance, paying attention only to the electronic Santa Claus up by the ceiling. At the last moment, I felt an arm jerking me backward. It was Neal Smith who, seeing what I was about to do, had run forward to rescue me. When he reached me, I was eighteen inches from the front edge of the stage, and still loping along, staring up at the screen. Two more steps and I would have ambled right off the stage and into the front rows of the slavering, snarling crowd, no doubt

never to be heard from again, the first victim of rock and roll cannibalism.

After the show, there were two crises. During the first part of the concert, Alice had done one of his standard Randi-taught magic tricks, which he used every night. When it was performed correctly, Alice would wave a filmy pink scarf at the audience, and then, faster than the eye could detect, transform it into a long black cane, which he would then parade around with before tossing it to the rear of the stage. But tonight, just after he had made the scarf into the cane, he had somehow dropped it, and a boy in the first row had leaned forward, caught it on the bounce, and pulled it into the audience. There had been a wild fight for possession of the cane, which is where the trouble occurred. The way the trick worked was that, attached to the scarf and hidden in Alice's palm, was a tiny, tightly wound coil of black, razer-sharp rolled steel. When Alice pressed a button, the coil was released, and the steel sprang forward into the shape of the cane. It looked like solid wood but was in fact a hollow, wickedly dangerous cylinder that, if tampered with, had all the cutting potential of a giant razor blade. And that is exactly what happened—another young man in the audience saw that the cane was within his reach, and lunged at the boy who had taken it from the stage. As they pulled and fought over it, the long steel coil began to come apart, baring several of its long, sharp edges. The second boy's hands had been severely sliced up, and he had been rushed out of the audience for treatment.

By the end of the show, he was all right, but Shep Gordon asked him to come back to the hotel to meet Alice and the rest of the band. "Alice feels terribly about what happened to you, and he wants to make sure you're okay," Shep said—but the unspoken sentiment was that if Alice could make friends with the young man, perhaps there would be no

thought of a lawsuit. As it turned out, the boy was so enthralled to be allowed in Alice Cooper's suite, and to actually see the members of the group in an off-stage setting, that the question of legal action never came up. It looked as if Shep had made it through another night—but just as the boy was leaving, the telephone rang, with news of crisis number two.

The call was from an official of the Capital Centre. For the past two hours, he had been dealing with the furious, frantic mother of a twelve-year-old girl. The mother had come to the arena to pick the girl up after the show—and had learned from friends of the girl that she had last been seen getting into a Cadillac limousine in the backstage area, accompanied by a number of rock and roll musicians. Now the daughter had still not come home, and the mother was panicking, she was thinking about calling the police, and so the arena man wanted to let Shep know about it.

Gordon knew that the girl had not returned to the hotel with us, but he made a check of all the rooms anyway, and then called the arena manager back. Shep talked to the girl's mother, assured her that no one in the Alice Cooper group was with her daughter—and then gave the arena official the telephone number of ZZ Top's hotel. ZZ Top had been our opening act for virtually the entire tour, but they traveled by commercial airlines and generally stayed in less-expensive places, and since they were going off stage just as we arrived at the halls, we didn't see much of them. The worried mother had not even considered that her daughter might be with another band—somehow, the idea of Alice Cooper and the limousine abduction of a twelve-year-old girl fit together so ideally that no other route of inquiry seemed necessary. The girl's mother asked Shep if he was sure that her daughter was not with this man Cooper.

“I’m sorry, ma’am,” Shep said. “I understand how worried you are, but I promise you, your child is not with anyone in our party.” He looked around the suite. Cindy Lang had returned to the tour. She and Alice were sitting in front of the television set, slumped in armchairs and quietly whiling the night away, Ma and Pa Kettle on the road.

SEVENTEEN

I went to my room and fell asleep with my clothes on. We were supposed to fly out of the Baltimore airport at three o'clock in the morning; the reason for the overnight flight was that our next show was not until the evening of December 22, in Tampa, and if we arrived in Florida at dawn on the morning after the Capital Centre concert, we would have three full days in the sun.

I did not mean to fall asleep. I had sat down on the bed, and had turned on my cassette machine to a tape I had made of the concert a few hours earlier. I had recorded the show from my spot on the side of the stage, because I wanted to have something by which to remember the sound of it. A week or so before, Mike Bruce had given me one of his live cassettes, and had said that I could keep it. But Mike's tape was one that Artie King had made from the sound board—it was a professional mixture of all the instruments and voices, with each part balanced correctly and the audience noise tuned out. It was much too clean and sterile-sounding, too much like a record. What I wanted was the sound of the enormous, jarring wash of raw noise that hit me every night, the sound of Dennis Dunaway's bass monitor that I always heard above the rest of the instruments, the curiously distant sound of Alice's voice, lost in the incredible roar of the guitars, the pounding of feet on the stage floor, the random cries from the hysterical ecstatic fans as they crushed against the wall of the barricade, the side comments of Norm Klein and the Amazing Randi, the shouts of the roadies as they tried to fix whatever went wrong with the equipment, while the show kept on going. That was what the concert sounded like to me on the stage—rough and dirty and uneven and full of a desperately exciting, intensely stirring immediacy that I still could not fully explain. And that is what I wanted to preserve as a kind of aural memento of the tour. The only way to do

that was just to go to my nightly spot on the stage, hold a recorder up in the air, and walk away with whatever ended up on the tape. Which I had done.

It was after midnight when I left Alice's suite and went to my room, and I knew that I had to stay awake for a couple of hours before the flight. So I turned the cassette machine to "play," and I started to listen to my tape of the concert. I heard "Hello! Hooray!" and "Billion Dollar Babies," and I think the beginning of "Elected"—and that was the last thing I remembered. When I woke up, the room was quiet. The tape machine was still turned on, but the tape had played itself out. I looked at my watch. It said three thirty. The Starship was to have taken off thirty minutes before. I felt my stomach knot up; Christ, I thought, they forgot to call me, they're on their way to Florida, and here I am stuck in Baltimore by myself. I ran out into the hallway.

There, asleep on top of his luggage in the middle of the floor, was the Amazing Randi. He had a sign from his doorknob strung around his neck: "maid please make up this room." I walked through the corridor, until I got to Libert's room. The door was open.

"I didn't want to wake you until we had to go," he said. "We've got a delay. They keep telling us any minute. If I'd have known it was going to be this late. I'd have just had us sleep here all night and go in the morning."

It got to be four o'clock, and then four thirty, and then five.

We finally left for the airport around five fifteen. In the lobby of the motel, tempers were short; no one wanted to be up at this hour, everyone looked pale and exhausted, and each additional momentary delay in checking out increased the touchiness. Charlie Carnal, the light man, was missing; Rebecca and Libert gave the limousine and bus drivers

orders to leave without him, and let him make his own way down to Florida in the three days before the show. There were shouts of angry protest from people who wanted to stay and find him, more shouts from others who wanted to get on with it. We left the motel, and rode quietly to the airport.

The Tampa concert was not supposed to be any normal performance. It was scheduled as the only outdoor show of the tour, in a stadium that could hold thirty-two thousand people for rock and roll. The band was not working on the usual sixty-percent-of-the-gate basis; for this one, Shep had signed a contract guaranteeing the group a fiat hundred thousand dollars for the one show. If three people showed up to see the concert, or if five hundred thousand stormed the gates of the stadium, Alice Cooper still would get their hundred thousand. Fifty thousand dollars had been paid in advance, and the other half would be handed to Gordon just before we went on stage.

We arrived at the Baltimore airport, and rode through an open gate onto a dark, snow-covered runway. Sitting in the middle of the empty field, the Starship looked even larger than it usually did. It was now painted, with a big “Alice Cooper” along both sides of the body above the windows, and two giant dollar signs on the tail. We struggled across the ice toward the plane—and saw the stewardesses in the light of the doorway, waving us back to the cars.

“We aren’t leaving,” one of them called down to us. Her voice carried through the cold, black predawn air, and everyone heard it. The bitter complaining and threatening began immediately. We all trooped up the stairs and into the airplane, as if by this demonstration that we were coming aboard anyway we could bully the pilots into taking off.

We learned the problem as soon as we got onto the plane. A part for one of the engines was malfunctioning, and a new one was needed. It had been ordered from Chicago, it had been scheduled to be flown in during the night, but it had not yet arrived. We could not leave Baltimore until the repair had been made. There was no chance that we would take off until noon; more than likely, it would be late afternoon.

The stewardesses had made us platters of cheese omelets, and we wolfed them down and drank orange juice and ate vitamin pills, bitching all the while. Random outbursts filled the cabin: “Why the fuck didn’t they call us and tell us this before we left the hotel?” “Why didn’t we stay all night here anyway, who wanted to fly in the middle of the night?” “Fucking Star Turkey One, that’s what this junkheap is.” Alice, still in the back seat of a limousine, dispatched Norm to come into the plane and bring him back a six-pack of Budweiser. It was 5:45 a.m., and we all moaned and cursed in our seats, and did not move.

Except for Rebecca Segal. As soon as she heard the news, she found an open office at the airport, and started making telephone calls. Amazingly, she found a top-quality motel, the Friendship Inn, that not only was two minutes from where we were, but also had vacant rooms enough for all of us. Rebecca even got the night clerks to agree to meet our usual keys-in-the-envelopes and room-lists-for-everyone requirements. We returned to the cars and buses, and within five minutes we were standing in the motel’s lobby, being stared at by the incredulous clerks and telephone operators and janitors. They had brewed pots of coffee, but few of us stayed around to take advantage of their hospitality; we all trudged to our rooms, ready to collapse. I had a king-size waterbed, and I enjoyed the feel of the waves against my back for at least four seconds before I fell asleep for the second time of the night.

We left for Florida at three p.m. Alice flipped through the new issue of *Time*; he tossed it across the cabin to me and said, “Check the letters to the editor.” I did, and saw that a letter-writer had nominated him for Man of the Year, noting that Alice Cooper was the only man in America left to believe in. Alice, wearing faded jeans with blue and pink baby pins holding the ripped legs together, seemed to be nervous. He kept looking around the plane, and finally he said to me, “Do you know who all these extra girls are?”

The Starship was more crowded than usual this afternoon. Many of the roadies planned to stay in Tampa over Christmas, since our first show after the Tampa Stadium performance was not scheduled until the night of December 26. So the roadies had brought along girlfriends to keep them company for the holiday, and there were unfamiliar female faces on the airplane.

Alice caught Libert’s eye, and David came over. He leaned down, and Alice whispered to him, “See that one really young girl at the table back there? Check her ID.”

“Rebecca already checked all of their IDs,” Libert said. “We’re clean.”

“I think you ought to double check that one,” Alice said. “I’d bet she’s not eighteen.”

“She is,” Libert said. “I already made sure.”

I asked Alice what that was all about. “I always check,” he said. “I don’t want to transport any underage girls across state lines. That’s all I need, a federal offense. The others get on me about it and give me a hard time, but if anyone gets busted on a Mann Act thing, you know who’s going to get the blame. Me. We have a bad enough reputation anyway,

they’d just love to pin something like that on us. It already happened once, on another tour. One of the roadies picked a really young girl up after a concert, and the next day he took her along. He said ‘Nothing can happen, we have a charter, who’s going to know?’ When we arrived at the next stop, the police were waiting. The girl’s parents had phoned ahead. I just won’t argue with these guys about it. If they want to take underage girls with them, they can do it on their own, but not on my plane.”

Libert and Ralph Cafuoco, one of the tour carpenters, disappeared into the galley. For days, David had been planning a special skit for this long flight to Florida. He had arranged to bring costumes on board, and sound equipment, and colored lights. The show was to be a takeoff on the people in the tour party, with Libert himself playing every role. I had talked to him about it a few days earlier; he had been happy and full of anticipation at the prospect of putting on the show, and he was anxious to make it the high point of the trip. Libert was, after all, a performer at heart himself, and in his parodies he saw a chance to step out, however momentarily, from the drudgery of his road manager responsibilities. He was determined to make the airborne comedy a success.

About halfway through the journey to Tampa, several of the roadies attached some stage spotlights to the walls of the Starship, hooked them up to a power source near the cockpit, and cleared away a stage area in the middle of the clubroom section. The airplane’s intercom was flipped on, and Libert’s voice announced, “It’s show time!”

Everyone on board started to make their way toward the site of Libert’s show. But Neal Smith, who was engaged in a card game with Artie King at a table about four feet from Libert’s makeshift stage, did not budge. And when the overhead

lights were switched off prior to Libert's entrance, Neal shouted, "Turn those lights back on!"

There was a momentary silence. Someone said, "But Neal, it's for the show..."

"Fuck the show," Neal said. "The show's right here." He had a hot hand of cards, and it looked like he was going to be able to win a couple of dollars from Artie, and nothing was going to get in his way. Never mind that he and his partners were going to make a hundred thousand dollars for eighty minutes' work in Tampa; he was not about to stop his card game for Libert's idea of fun.

So we waited while Neal played out his hand and dealt another one. Eventually, others on board began to ask him to stop. "Come on, Neal, the show's about to start," a roadie said. "I don't care," Neal said, not looking up from his hand. In a few minutes, though, the sentiment had turned completely against him, and he slapped down his cards, let out a bored, let's-get-on-with-it sigh, and nodded his wordless permission for the play to begin.

Libert obviously had spent a great deal of time dreaming up the skit. He came out dressed, in succession, like Alice, Neal, Mike, Dennis, and Glen, and did broad takeoffs on each of them, with blackouts in between for the costume changes. During the blackouts, he offered one-liners over the intercom system, so the boys would not become restless. One skit consisted of a parody on the infamous night in Toledo. Libert played three parts: himself, Alice, and Shep. He set the scene by saying he was on the long-distance telephone to Gordon, just after the band had walked off the stage and returned to the motel:

Libert as Shep (in a fierce, inflamed voice): "WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU MEAN, WALKED OFF THE STAGE? YOU STUPID

ASSHOLE, LIBERT, YOU’RE SUPPOSED TO BE THE ROAD MANAGER! DON’T GIVE ME ANY EXCUSES, GET HIM BACK ON THE STAGE! I DON’T WANT TO HEAR IT, LIBERT, JUST GET HIM ON STAGE! PUT ALICE ON THE PHONE!”

Libert as Alice: “Hello, Shep, this is Alice.”

Libert as Shep (Soft and soothing and gentle and amused): “Alice! You walked off stage! Heh heh! That’s so cute!”

I love it! Don’t worry about it! No problem! Could I talk to David again?”

Libert as Libert: “Shep, the guys don’t want to…”

Libert as Shep (angrier and more hysterical): “I DON’T CARE, LIBERT, I DON’T CARE IF YOU HAVE TO DRAG THEIR ASSES OUT THERE! GET THEM ON STAGE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND? WHAT KIND OF A ROAD MANAGER DO I HAVE? I WANT THAT SHOW TO GO ON, LIBERT! GIVE ME ALICE AGAIN!”

Libert as Alice: “Hi, Shep.”

Libert as Shep (happy and at peace with the world): “Everything going okay Alice? Just have a good time, do whatever you feel like doing. You walked off stage! God, that’s so funny! You do the funniest things! Let me have David back, okay?”

Libert as Libert: “Just listen a minute, Shep…”

Libert as Shep (furious to the point of explosion): “DON’T TELL ME TO LISTEN, LIBERT! IF YOU CAN’T DO THIS JOB, YOU JUST LET ME KNOW! I DON’T EXPECT EXCUSES, I EXPECT THAT BAND TO BE BACK OUT ON THAT STAGE, DO YOU UNDERSTAND ME, LIBERT?”

Libert as Libert: “Shep, I got the money.”

Libert as Shep (calm and rational): “You got the money? You got the money from the box office? Okay, fuck ’em. We’re not going back on their fucking stage.”

When David had finished his skit, the Starship passengers gave him a brief, cursory round of applause, then went back to the card games and the videotape monitors. He circulated in the cabin, but no one thanked him for going to the trouble, or told him they thought the show was funny. Libert was a road manager, and it was his job to keep them amused. They expected it from him. I felt badly for him, and apparently one of the stewardesses did too. She walked up to him, and said, “David, the pilots said to tell you that they enjoyed your show. They’re sorry they couldn’t see it, but from listening to it in the cockpit they thought it was hilarious.”

“Ah,” Libert said.

As we approached the Tampa airport, he went back on the plane’s PA system to announce, “Welcome to Tampa, better late than never. The limos will be on the field when we land, and tomorrow, for anyone who feels like fishing or just getting out on the water, we’ve rented an eighty-foot yacht for the whole day.”

“What if it rains, Libert?” Neal said.

There was no yacht ride. As soon as we disembarked in Tampa, we felt the cold wind, and the limousine drivers told us that there had been frost warnings all week. The next morning the sun was out, but it was no warmer than a Midwestern day in early November. No one even went out to the swimming pool of our motel, much less on a boat cruise. Rebecca went shopping for long underwear for all of us to wear on stage under our clothing the next night, and the

roadies met with Larry Hitchcock to devise a plan for setting up portable heaters to keep us relatively comfortable during the performance.

Things were less than festive, and in the middle of the afternoon I felt my throat beginning to close up. I took some aspirin and went for a walk around the motel. I passed Rebecca's room; her door was open, so I went in to say hello.

"Everyone's getting sick," she said. "Neal thinks he has strep throat, Mike Bruce can't swallow, Cindy Lang's in bed. This is a great Florida trip. Everyone's coming down with something."

"Me too," I said.

"You're sick too?" Rebecca said. "That does it. I'm calling a doctor and getting him over here. If you guys don't get fixed up, the whole tour's going to end up with the same infection."

I went back to my room to wait for the doctor. I passed the time by going out onto my terrace overlooking the river and feeding the seagulls. By this time I had really lapsed into a rock and roll tour mind frame—the cost for bread from room service was $1.65 for six slices, and I kept ordering them, tearing the bread up and throwing it to the birds, and ordering again. I'd order a bottle of Heineken with every call for more bread, and by the time the room service waiter had made his third trip with his burden of dry bread and beer, he was convinced that he was dealing with a true lunatic.

The doctor came to my room in about an hour. He looked at my throat, shot me up with penicillin, and ordered me a bottle of antibiotic pills from a local drugstore. There was supposed to be a party for us that night, but I was feeling pretty lousy, and instead I watched a Christmas movie on

television, threw the dregs of my room service cheeseburger dinner to the birds, and went to bed.

I don’t know how long the telephone had been ringing before I heard it. I groped for the night table, and came up with my watch. It was seven o’clock in the morning. No one was ever up at seven on the tour. Had to be a wrong number. The phone kept ringing, and I picked it up. It was Alice.

“We’re going to play golf,” he said. “You want to come?”

I mumbled that I was sick, hung up the phone, and went back to sleep. I got out of bed around noon, got dressed, and went down to the restaurant for lunch. I should have known that something was odd when Alice had called about going to the golf course. On show days, he seldom left his room, preferring to rest up for the concert. When I walked into the restaurant, I saw three of the roadies at a table. I waved hello, and asked them what time the show was supposed to start.

“You didn’t hear?” Ralph Cafuoco said. “No show.”

“What?” I asked.

“Weren’t you around last night when they decided?” he said.

“No,” I said. “I stayed in. Are you kidding?”

“Have you ever seen us around the hotel this late on the day of a show?” Ralph said. “If we were playing tonight, wouldn’t we be setting up the stage?”

I had my lunch, then went to look for Libert. I found him out on his terrace, trying to get some sun. It was true. The stadium concert had been canceled.

The story was this: Alice was not very happy at the prospect of playing outdoors in near-freezing weather. He kept thinking that he would work up a heavy sweat, and come down with pneumonia for Christmas. Neal and Mike were sick already. The stage crew was concerned that, even with the portable heaters and long underwear, it would be hard for the performers during the show. There was a general feeling that the band would just as soon not play this date. But a hundred thousand dollars was a hundred thousand dollars.

Shep had a plan that he thought might enable the group to win both ways. The sales of tickets for the concert had been woefully low; because of the cold snap in Florida, teenagers who would normally make a festival out of the outdoor concert were not buying tickets in advance, but instead were waiting to see if the weather warmed up. No one was sure how many fans would show up for the performance. Emergency measures were already being taken; the opening acts had been rescheduled to begin in the afternoon, rather than at night, so that we could go on stage just after the sun went down. Doing our show in the afternoon was out of the question—somehow the morbid, villainous Cooper stage show would lose most of its evil impact in broad daylight. Even with a burst of warm weather on the day of the show, it was feared that the crowd would not fill half the stadium. And there was not going to be any burst of warm weather.

In a normal concert situation, this would not make a big difference. The group would play, take their sixty percent, and if the turnout was low their paycheck would be low. But in signing the Tampa contract, of course, Shep had anticipated the possibility of a problem like this. He had his hundred thousand-dollar guarantee.

So he went to the local promoters of the concert with a plan. He knew that ticket sales were bad, and that the promoters were nervous about the weather. The promoters had already spent around twenty thousand on publicity, rentals, and other fees, and they knew that if they were to put on the concert in front of a half-full stadium, they would take a major loss. Shep offered an alternative. He said that he would be willing to call the concert off—if the promoters were willing to let him keep the fifty thousand-dollar advance. That way, the promoters would still lose money, although not as much as if they had to put out the full hundred thousand. Shep told them that if they wanted to cancel the concert, he would let them—and give them an option on another stadium date the next time the band toured, with the fifty thousand being credited toward the advance of that future concert. In effect, Shep was engineering a way for his group to make fifty thousand out of the Tampa date without stepping on stage. The promoters did not realize how reluctant the Cooper band was to perform anyway—but they did know that if they had to put out the hundred thousand dollars, and only a small number of fans came out in the cold, they were going to lose far more than the twenty thousand in expenses and fifty thousand in advance money that this new agreement with Gordon would cost them. And this way, they would at least have a shot at making up the loss at some future date. They agreed to accept Gordon's deal. The radio stations and newspapers were notified. The show was canceled.

"But what if the promoters would have said nothing doing?" I asked Libert. "What if they would have insisted that the show go on? People are sick, and Alice doesn't want to sing outside in the cold—what would have happened?"

"What would have happened is that you'd be wearing your long underwear," Libert said. "If the promoters had called

our bluff and had demanded that we go on stage, then we'd go out there wearing overcoats and ski hats in a goddamn blizzard to get the hundred thousand dollars. They knew that we had 'em, and this way they may get their money back some day."

I asked him if the promoters had been crushed by the loss of the money.

"I have to hand it to the financial backer," Libert said. "I saw him lose his seventy thousand dollars just like that, and he sat there and took it like a man. You have to understand these people, they're gamblers. When you've seen enough of them, you realize that that's the one thing they all have in common. They're no different than any other gamblers, and most of them are ready to take a beating, because they know there's also a chance they can clean up in one night. It's a strange kind of man, but I'll tell you, they're all over the place."

Thus the band, fifty thousand dollars richer for the effort of hanging around the motel for two days, would be leaving Tampa the next morning. The Starship was going to fly to New York. I decided to catch the first available commercial flight to Chicago, and get into my own bed and try to get rid of whatever it was I was taking the pills for. Then I would fly to New Haven on the day after Christmas, for the next performance.

I went around to the rooms to say Merry Christmas to everyone, and then called a cab. On the way to the lobby I ran into Rebecca.

"Shep's amazing," she said. "You'd think he'd be satisfied to walk out of here with all that money, right? Well, as soon as he'd made the deal with the promoters, he called my room.

He wanted to make sure that I returned the long underwear to the store and got our money back.”

EIGHTEEN

I caught a mid-evening Delta flight north, and arrived in Chicago around midnight. The days on the road had been so exhilarating that I had not realized how exhausted I was from all the travel. The effect was not unlike taking days and days of amphetamines, one on top of the other, to maintain a cruising speed; once I gave myself a chance to sleep, I couldn't stop. I woke up from time to time, wondering where Libert's telephone calls were, or trying to figure out what city I was in. And every night there was a big hole during the hours when I knew I should be at the show. I was homesick for the road. But it felt good to rest, and by the morning of the twenty-sixth my throat infection was gone, and I was anxious to get back on the tour.

I decided to give myself plenty of time to get to New Haven, in case there were flight delays because of winter weather. I got a noon flight out of O'Hare, which was scheduled to arrive in Hartford just after three. Then I planned to take an airport limousine to New Haven, and have hours to waste before going to the show.

The plane took off on time, and as we approached Hartford at a few minutes before three o'clock, it looked as if I had been overly cautious, and could have taken a later flight. I was already thinking about seeing if Neal and Mike wanted to go out to dinner when the pilot's voice came over the PA box:

''There's a general power failure in the vicinity of the Hartford airport, and we're being asked to stay in a holding pattern. They haven't had any flights coming in or out of there, but they're trying to get it fixed. Your guess is as good as mine as to when we'll be landing. So lean back, read a magazine, and we'll keep you informed just as soon as we learn anything."

I looked at my watch. No problem. I had hours to spare, we could circle the field until six o'clock and I'd still be all right.

I took my tour itinerary out of my briefcase and turned to the New Haven page. We weren't due to go on stage at the New Haven Coliseum until nine thirty. But tonight's opening act, instead of ZZ Top, was a group called Jett Black, which was being produced and guided along by Mike Bruce. Mike was excited about getting into that end of the business, and I had promised that I would ride over to the Coliseum early with him, and watch Jett Black perform. Still, I had all kinds of time to get there. New Haven was only forty-five minutes or an hour away from Hartford.

We kept circling. The pilot made a few more announcements, telling us that the power was still out in Hartford. I read a newspaper. And then the pilot's voice came on again:

"Well, folks, I hope you like Boston. Because that's where we're going. The tower in Hartford says that there's not much chance of getting their power back real soon, and we don't want to take any chances of running out of fuel. So—sorry for the inconvenience, but we'll be landing in Boston as soon after four o'clock as we can."

I began motioning frantically for the stewardess. She hurried over, as if she thought I was having heart seizure, which is about how I felt. The last thing I had told Shep and Libert before I left Florida was not to worry about me, I'd get to New Haven on my own. "Are you sure?" Libert had said. "We're driving from New York in limousines, you're more than welcome to ride with us. That way there's no chance you'll get separated from the rest of the group." But I had said no, I'd take care of everything, I'd see him at the New

Haven Holiday Inn. And now here I was, on my way to Massachusetts.

“Are you all right?” the stewardess asked me.

“I’m terrible,” I said. “Are we going to fly back to Hartford as soon as it’s open?”

“I doubt it,” she said. “They need this airplane for another flight. I would guess that we’ll bus you over, if we can get a bus.”

“Are there any other flights?” I asked.

“I’m sure nothing’s going into Hartford,” she said. “Let me bring you the airline flight guide.”

She brought me the thick paperbound book. Even if the power in Hartford was restored, there were no flights that would get me there from Boston in time for the show. New Haven had its own small airport, but the commuter flights into there were no good, either. My only chance was if ground transportation could get me to Connecticut by show time. I had no idea how far it was from Boston to New Haven. Because I did not own a car in Chicago, I wasn’t carrying a driver’s license, so there would be no way for me to rent a car. The airline’s charter bus—if there was one—was going to be my one shot.

We landed in Boston, in the middle of a blizzard of freezing rain and wet snow. We sat on the ground for about ten minutes before the stewardesses told us what was going to happen. First the baggage would be unloaded. Then, at five o’clock, a bus would leave for Hartford. No one was really sure, but someone thought that it was a three-hour ride. Three hours to Hartford, and another hour to New Haven; I would be there at nine o’clock—if there were no more

delays. I ran into the airport, found a pay phone, and called the motel in New Haven. I asked for David Libert.

“Where are you?” he said.

“Boston,” I said. “We’re leaving here at five. The bus is going to take us to the Hartford airport.” I explained what had happened.

“Can I count on you to make it?” he said.

“I’ll be there,” I said. “I might not make it by the beginning of the show, but I’ll be on stage by the time I’m supposed to go on.”

“Do you have any money in your pocket?” he said. “I’d send a limousine to meet you in Hartford, but if you’re as late as it looks like you’re going to be, we’ll need the limos to go to the show.”

“I have money,” I said. “I’ll see you at the hall.”

“Okay,” he said. “I’m going to assume that you’ll be there, then. Don’t let me down.”

I hung, up and tried to find the chartered bus. The airport was jammed; flights were being delayed and canceled, and it was almost impossible to squeeze through the waiting areas. I went out into the storm, and found the bus. I climbed aboard and took a seat. Five o’clock came and went. The driver wanted to make sure that everyone from the flight had made it. I began to chew on the inside of my mouth. It got to be five thirty. The rain and snow were coming harder. A young wife asked the driver to wait for her husband, who was trying to find a lost suitcase. The bus driver said he would be glad to wait. The inside of the bus was muggy and rancid. The husband arrived. We crawled onto a busy street, just in time to join a massive traffic jam.

The bus driver asked if we would like to take a vote on stopping somewhere for a nice dinner.

“No!” I shouted, as if he had just threatened to drive off a bridge.

The other passengers turned around to see who the psychopath was. I smiled shyly and waved to them, and then raised my hand. “I vote no,” I said calmly.

We voted. The don’t-stop-for-dinner people won by two votes. The driver said we would drive straight to the Hartford airport. A man in the seat behind me began to bellow that *he* wanted to be dropped at the Hartford Hilton first, it was closer to his home. An argument began. The driver said that he wasn’t really sure what the best way to get to Hartford was, did anyone have any ideas? The blizzard intensified; we slowed to perhaps thirty miles per hour. A second argument erupted among the passengers, over which route to Hartford was the quickest. The bus driver remained an impartial observer. The man behind me still was yelling that he demanded to be let off at the Hilton first. The mood among this busload of strangers was getting a bit nasty, and we were still inside the Boston city limits. It also felt as though the driver had turned his special carbon monoxide interior fume-blower on full blast, to subdue us; everyone around me was taking on a sickly pall. I looked at my watch, listened to the shouting, and breathed in another chestful of poisonous gases. I figured that since it didn’t look as though there was much I could do to affect this little trip one way or another, the most seemly course probably was to place myself in the hands of the fates once again. I pushed the little button on my armrest, crunched the seatback toward the rear until it had smashed the legs of the man who was still crying that he must be let off at the Hartford Hilton, and waited to see what would happen next.

One benefit from the bus ride was the opportunity to do some thinking about my own on-stage role in the show, and how I would remember it when the Cooper trip was over. Although my part made up only a tiny portion of the tour day, those moments in front of the crowd would be, I knew, what I would try the hardest to recall in detail in the years to come. And yet, while I was a member of the Cooper traveling party, being on stage did not seem so unusual, because everyone with me was fully familiar with the phenomenon of performing before a rock and roll crowd. Therefore, during the tour, the impulse was to act very cool and quiet about it; had I started jabbering to the others about what it felt like for me to walk out there in front of the audience, it would have bored them no end.

But on this bus full of people I had never met, I thought what a singular experience my part in the Cooper show really was for me.

On show nights, my feelings about performing began to take hold as soon as we arrived in the dressing room at whatever arena we were playing. The locker room time affected me in two different ways. On one level, I was tempted to eat the cold cuts and drink the whisky, and take advantage of the pleasurable, comfortable surroundings. In that way, the locker rooms were an extension of the Starship and the motels—they were places where everything had been taken care of to assure that we were catered to and happy, and it was fun being there. Usually there were local people who had obtained backstage passes, and who were waiting for us as we arrived from the hotel, and it was always good for the ego to see them staring as we poured into the dressing room *en masse*.

But at the same time, I became full of nervousness, and an urgent desire for the show to begin. I found myself pacing in

the dressing room while all the others remained calm and seemingly uncaring. I would walk back and forth between the locker room and the stage perhaps half a dozen times, to check on the progress of the roadies in setting up our equipment. I would go into the tuning room to see how the guitar players were coming along in their efforts to get their instruments ready for the show. All my years as a spectator at mass entertainment events had not prepared me for this—for the knowledge that there was nothing to be nervous about, because there wasn't going to be any show until we were good and ready. I was always the kind of person who would arrive at a football game or a concert fifteen minutes early, just to make sure I didn't miss anything. And I wasn't able to ditch that habit on the tour, no matter how well I understood intellectually that it was impossible for the concert to begin without us. I could not shake the feeling that, unless I kept checking out front, I was liable to fail to be there for the opening part of the show.

In the dressing room, I always had a slightly drunk sensation, too. I knew that it was not the alcohol that made me feel that way, because it was the same on nights when I did not have much to drink as it was on nights when Neal and I had been at the hotel bar for three hours. So it must have been the result of the adrenaline pumping through my body—the pure giddiness of being up for the show. I always felt like talking in the dressing room, chattering about subjects that at any other time would have held no interest for me. It was an outlet for the nervousness, and this was something that plagued all of the others, too. They might have been experienced enough not to go running out to the stage like I did, but they weren't able to fight off the flighty drive to fill the air with words in the minutes before we were called to perform. Anyone walking into the dressing room at five minutes to showtime would have thought that we had all been sucking on tubes of laughing gas, so rapidly and

crazily were we talking at one another. I always felt like running laps just before we went on stage.

One thing I missed because of my lifetime role as a spectator at these public entertainments was the dramatic buildup to the main event. Out front, the audiences had sat through an opening act, then through the intermission while our roadies worked on the stage, then through another calculated period in the darkness—all of this designed to increase their anticipation, to give them the feeling that something very special was about to happen. I remember going to a Rolling Stones concert once, at the International Amphitheatre in Chicago, and waiting and waiting and waiting for the Stones to come on—and with each delay, my impatience had become greater, my desire to see the show more intense. Had the tickets said eight o'clock, and the Rolling Stones appeared at eight o'clock, it would have been a letdown. But after all the waiting, the intensity of the pressure in the audience was so great that when the Stones finally did appear, the place almost blew apart. The teasing had a purpose; it was good showmanship and good business. But here on the tour, we were the main event, and we weren't subjected to much waiting. We arrived at the arenas late. And it was always surprising to me that when David Libert came into the dressing room and said, "Okay, let's go," we were actually up on the stage and into the first song within thirty seconds. It made sense, of course—why alert us before it was absolutely necessary?—but I never could quite adjust to the jarring transfer from the sedate locker room to the roaring, shaking main hall of the arena. It always seemed to me as though there should be a holding area somewhere in between, to pump us up to that final state of readiness.

Once we were on stage, I relaxed. Since my part did not come until the end of the show, I sat on the metal dentist's table and took in the performance like everyone else.

Sometimes I walked behind the set and took a look from the other side of the stage, usually during the periods when the Amazing Randi was getting ready to do his parts. He had all kinds of mechanical paraphernalia stored in the area of the stage where he and I sat, so I got out of his way whenever I could. Oddly, the first part of the performance was calmer for me than the time in the locker room, because here I had something to do—watch Alice and the band at work. The show was virtually the same each evening, despite its appearance of nefarious, spontaneous anarchy, and so waiting for my cue was like observing someone assemble a large, particularly ugly jigsaw puzzle—there was no question about how everything was going to fit together, and the only thing for me to do was wait for the moment I knew was coming.

Although my cue to go into the on-stage dressing room did not come until the first chords of “School’s Out,” I would usually sense the return of my tension during “I Love the Dead,” when Alice would be preparing for his beheading scene. I would watch the chopping every night, and then walk hastily toward the rear of the stage. Always, I would be feeling good—this was the part of the night that made my presence on the stage legitimate. On the way back, I would pass the roadies, holding the big balloons they would soon be tossing out to the audience. They would slap me on the back or say “good luck”—little things, but enough to add to the air of going to do a job.

The area behind the stage was different each night. Often, it would be empty, but sometimes there would be seats up there in the arena, filled with overflow fans who had watched the entire show from the back. They would be waving and calling down, and once in a while I’d pause for a moment and talk to them. By this time, Alice would be in the dressing booth, having crawled back through a screen of

smoke after the decapitation act had been carried out. So I would duck under the booth’s black curtains, and wait for him to relinquish using the little metal folding chair.

This was always an extraordinary feeling. The rest of the band would be out on the stage, dragging and pummeling what was supposed to be Alice’s dead body. I would hear the crowd screaming his name. And here we would be, talking peacefully about a girl we had seen in the audience, or something that had happened during the performance, or what we thought of the day’s hotel. It was always pleasant and unhurried, with Alice showing no more stage fright than if he had been drinking beer in front of the television in his room. Sometimes he would launch into a story about something that had happened to him as a kid, giving every impression that the only thing he had to do for the rest of the night was to sit around and shoot the bull. And then we would hear the instrumentalists hit the first chords of "School’s Out,” and he would slowly get up, say, “See you in a while,” and calmly walk out to be a demented rock and roll idol again. Within ten seconds I would hear the screams from the crowd escalate as they caught sight of him once more, and then I would hear him snarling the words to “School’s Out.”

Now the dressing booth was mine. I always had more than enough time to get dressed, and each night I found myself newly surprised that my hands were shaking a little. My part, after all, was not the most difficult in the world to master. Still, the prospect of going before the crowd again got to me every evening. The first thing I would do was find the costume, and lay it out on the floor, piece by piece, to make sure that nothing was missing. I would turn around and look through a crack in the stage structure; I could see the feet of all the musicians, bouncing around up there, and I could feel the stage pulsing from Neal’s drums up above

me. I would sing along with “School’s Out” as I put the costume on, seldom failing to think how silly I must look, yapping out rock and roll lyrics behind a Santa Claus beard. I would inevitably finish getting dressed before the song was over, so I would sit on the chair and tap my feet. Waiting in the booth, I would experience an unusual combination of relaxation and excitement. The music was so loud, and I knew that at this point I would kill to go on stage, there was no one who could keep me off. But at the same time, I often became almost reflective as I sat in the dressing room. It was here that I would think about what it would be like when I went back to my job, whether I would ever be able to recapture in my mind the reality of all the nights spent in this hot, noisy little on-stage cubicle. Sometimes I thought of what I might be doing twenty-five or fifty years from now, and wonder how I would explain to the teenagers in whatever neighborhood I would be living just what it was that I had been doing during this certain December, and whether they would understand, or even be interested. And I wondered how it would seem in my own mind then—whether my memory of it would be true, as an old man looking back. I never knew why, but I always had the suspicion that a seventy-five-year-old version of myself would deny that I had ever done this, would reject the recollection as a trick played by the mind. It seemed impossible to me that, even a few years on, I would be able to bring back the absurd, extraordinary feeling of being in this little room and waiting to go out and appear before ten or fifteen or twenty thousand rock and roll-maddened people.

I would usually sit on the chair all the way through “School’s Out,” and then “Working Up A Sweat.” The last thing I would do before leaving the booth would be to pat the rear of my Santa Claus pants to feel for my wallet, and then the front, to feel for my motel room key. I was always worried that they would get knocked out of my jeans—which I wore

underneath the pocketless costume pants—during the on-stage scuffle, and that some front-row battler would leap over the barricade and walk away with them as a souvenir. As “Working Up A Sweat” ended, I would walk down the back ledge of the stage, and wait to go on.

I would stand near the rear of the stage, on the right side, between two of the roadies, Andy Mills and Ralph Cafuoco. I would try to stay as far out of the audience’s view as I could, since they always reacted better if the entrance of Santa Claus took them by surprise. But I had to stand far enough forward to look over at the left front edge of the stage, and see when the band began to come out.

They always trotted on stage together, but for some reason, every night, I had this weird optical illusion; in the distance, I would make out the hazy forms of all of them, but Mike Bruce’s grin somehow appeared close up and clear, and that was my cue to go on.

The feeling? Visually, the stage lost all of its glitter and impressive flash for me as soon as I stepped onto it. It was like the difference between watching a basketball game and being struck by the glistening handsomeness of the court down below, and playing in the game, seeing only the backboards and the nets. As I walked across the stage I did not even notice the gold super-structures and the glowing stairways and the fancy lighting arrangements. I could see only the individual floorboards, and the placement numbers on the scratched pieces of Plexiglas. I would wonder where all the glamour had gone; but the next night, I would sit on the metal table at the beginning of the show again, and it would look great all over again.

The sounds of the arena would become different too as soon as I went on. Even with the earplugs, the high-volume music brought a steady, piercing buzz to my head every night—

but it would go away as soon as I arrived on the stage for my part. It was replaced by an enormous, formless, low roar, a combination of the crowd noise, and the Christmas tape, and my own footsteps. It was a jumble, a blur; I felt as though all my blood had rushed to my ears and caught on fire. I could hear, yes, but only through this thick layer of crazy noise. It was a sensation unlike any I had ever had—and it would disappear as soon as we left the stage each evening.

If the sound was a blur, it was only one component in my general, giant, all-senses blur while I was on stage. Now I felt no nervousness—but neither did I have any conception of time. I never had any idea of how long I was out there. It was like being in a daze, and no matter how many times I told myself to try to pay attention, I went into that dim, hazy trance as soon as the spotlights hit me. Alice had been right about the Super Troupers—I could *feel* them, not just the glaring light, but the warmth and the power from them. One night, after I had taken a few steps toward the front of the stage, I sensed that something was wrong. I didn't know what it was, but I marked time in place, and then the beam from the spotlight hit me, and I realized that it hadn't been trained on me at first, and I had known that it was missing. In that one moment every night—the first moment when the spotlight swept across the stage and trained in on me—I could identify at least in a small, fragmentary way, with what Alice must have felt each evening as he appeared before the crowd. I would walk to the front edge of the stage, and gesture to the people in the first few rows, and they would reach their arms out and strain against the barricade and lunge toward me, and even though we were but five feet apart, it was as if they were staring across a chasm of a thousand miles, so great was the psychic distance between performer and audience. Sometimes I would heave presents into the middle rows of the arena, and I would lift my arms to wave to the recipients—and a sea of upraised arms would

come back in return, from all over the hall. It was an astounding feeling, and the illusion of foggy timelessness increased with each second I was out there. The audience would be a faceless mass, and then one person would pop out at me. On night, as I was working my way toward my meeting with the band, I saw a girl, sitting on her boyfriend's shoulders, perhaps seven rows back. She looked about fifteen years old, no older, and she was wearing net stockings that reached halfway up her thighs, and a black garter belt and black lacy underpants, and nothing else beneath the waist. Right out of *Penthouse*, and I am ashamed to admit that my first thought, as I spotted her, was what her mother could have been thinking when she let her leave the house like that. But instances that I could remember from my time on stage were the exception; mostly the blur was unbroken.

When I would get close to the elevated piece of stage where I was to meet the band, we would enter a common field of vision, and it really *did* seem like meeting anew in some strange city. Our handshakes and palm-slaps of greeting were not faked; in some ridiculous way, it really *did* feel good to see one another out here again. "Eh?" Alice would say as he shook my hand and prepared to smash me. And then I would go down, and see the five laughing faces as they threw punches and kicks and tried not to let them land too hard. The audience was in erotic chaos, and it seemed so funny, we were all laughing, and every night I heard one of the group's voices say, "Okay, let's go," as soon as the skit had run its course, and they would pick me up—I would still be going through the pretense of being dead—and carry me off. And the instant the spotlights left us, they would put me down, and we would stand there for a moment, looking at one another, the exciting part of the day now over. For those few seconds, we were like commuters riding the 5:48 train home from the office, exhausted and down. For me, every

night it felt as though the dream sequence was over; suddenly I could hear clearly again, I was out of the daze.

One of the things that I did not feel on stage was fear, which surprised me. I had called Tom Davies, the Toledo *Blade* reporter, a few days after our aborted concert there, and he had told me that one of the young men in the audience had been found carrying a loaded handgun. That scared me, and I spent a lot of time off stage thinking about the possibility of a rock and roll assassination. After Toledo, I knew that such a thought was not mere paranoia, and the prospect of a bullet coming out of the audience toward Alice seemed far too real for me to dismiss as being overly dramatic. Before going to the show every night, I always told myself to keep my eyes roving when I was out there, to look for danger before it happened. The show was far too violent, too dark-spirited for me to put out of mind the possibility of one crazy person out in the crowd who wanted to do his own part in the Alice Cooper outrage. But somehow, that caution disappeared along with everything else as soon as I walked on. I never spent a moment while I was on stage thinking about what might be coming from the direction of the audience, even after Toledo.

The locker room afterwards was always dominated by the unremitting buzzing sound in my ears. Most nights I could hear “Working Up a Sweat” playing for almost an hour after we had gone off. I would drink a Coke, and feel absolutely fatigued—irrationally so, because my time on stage had been so short, but the physical drain was undeniable. I would have to catch my breath. If we all were non-stop talkers before the show, afterwards we would hardly say a word. Everyone felt the same ragged emptiness. I would go to the tuning room, where we were all supposed to hang our costumes so Rebecca could pack them for the next town, and the guitar players would be there, saying almost

nothing to one another. I always had the feeling of wanting to be led away to wherever we had to go, and Libert would take us physically to the cars, never trusting us to find them for ourselves. On the way back to the motel, the down feeling about the show being over would usually disappear, and I would begin to feel wide awake, and hours away from sleep. If the ride was a long one, we would all be talking again by the time we pulled up to the lobby.

No matter how standard that show-night routine was, I could never get used to it. Especially the feeling of being in a numb coma on stage—night after night I would tell myself, come *on*, you're supposed to be a reporter, *observe* while you're out there this time, pretend you're taking notes. And night after night, the fog would envelop my mind as soon as the spotlights hit me, and would not go away until we were off on the other side of the stage. I asked Neal Smith about it once, and he said "that's how you're supposed to feel. It's what performing's all about. It's what separates you from the audience." And as I rode along on the bus from Boston to Hartford, I found it hard to believe that, if I got lucky and made it to New Haven on time, it would all be starting again in just a few hours.

The bus pulled up at the Hartford airport at 8:15 p.m. We were still inside the blizzard. Apparently, flights that had been scheduled to land in Hartford had been diverted all over the Eastern seaboard, because we were only one of about a dozen buses on the airport driveway. I ran off the bus and into the terminal. I had not eaten since breakfast, and I was hungry and weary. The airport was even more crowded than Boston had been, and much of the crush was gathered around the taxicab desk.

I knew that I simply had to get to New Haven for the concert. It wasn't a matter of "the show must go on"; if I didn't make

it, Randi could play Santa Claus, and the audience would never know the difference. But as long as I had plunged myself into this game, I was going to do what was expected of any of the other performers—and the first rule was, be there at showtime. If Mike Bruce did not appear for a curtain, Shep would be chewing him out for the next six months. Just because I was temporary help did not excuse me from the responsibility of making it to the concert, and I did not want to let Shep and the band think that I took this tour as such a lark that it didn't matter to me if I didn't show up for a performance or two. I was determined that I wasn't going to have to make excuses in the morning about why they had not heard from me after the Boston phone call, and why I was not in the dressing booth during "School's Out." It made no difference that my excuses would have been fairly valid ones. Somehow I thought that if I missed the show tonight, I would be letting myself down.

I pushed my way to the taxi desk, amid a mob of tired, unhappy, irritated travelers. I hoisted my briefcase, with its "Alice Cooper—Backstage" stickers plastered all over it, onto the desk. "Look," I said. "I know that everyone's in the same situation. But I have to be on stage in New Haven in one hour."

The clerk looked up at me. "You've seen the weather," he said. "I can't make you any guarantees about one hour."

"I don't care," I said. "Can you get me a driver?"

"I don't know," he said. "If I do, it'll cost you $33."

"Fine," I said. "But can you hurry?"

He picked up a microphone and paged a driver by name. The driver, behind the crowd, waved to the dispatcher. "This

guy’s got to be on stage in New Haven in an hour,” the dispatcher called. “He’ll pay you thirty-three bucks.”

The driver motioned for me to come through the crowd to meet him. I hurried through the angry people who were still waiting, and we went outside to his parked cab. We started through the snow. The roads were miserable, but he was going as fast as he could. We didn’t talk much on the way over; the driving was so hazardous that he was giving all of his attention to the task of keeping the cab on the road. At quarter after nine, we were on the outskirts of New Haven. I remembered that I did not have a current pass to get into the show, and if security at the hall was as tight as it usually was, there was going to be no way that I could talk my way in. I hoped that Libert had thought of that, and had left me a pass at the motel.

“Do you know where the Holiday Inn on Whalley Avenue is?” I asked the driver. “We have to stop there first.”

“Nope,” he said. “We’ll have to look for it. I don’t know the streets in New Haven.”

We wasted fifteen minutes skidding around downtown, looking up and down streets for that fluorescent green sign. We couldn’t find it, and the weather was so bad that no one was out on the street, so we couldn’t stop and ask. Finally we pulled up in front of a laundromat, and the driver went in to get instructions from the patrons. At nine forty, we arrived at the motel.

“Come inside with me to get instructions on how to get to the hall,” I said. The driver left his cab running in the parking lot, and we went in together.

“You Greene?” the clerk asked me.

“Yes,” I said. “Did David Libert leave a pass for me?”

“No, but he said you’d be coming, and to give you your room key,” the clerk said.

“Tell this man how to get to the arena,” I said. “I’m taking my bags upstairs.”

“Oh, they’ve been gone to the coliseum for a long time,” the clerk said. “You’re late.”

“I know,” I said. “Will you tell him how to get there?”

I rode the elevator to my room, and tossed my suitcase and briefcase onto the floor. I ripped an old backstage pass off the briefcase and stuck it to my overcoat. I hoped that the cops would not check the date stamped on it. I went back downstairs.

“We’re real close,” the driver said.

We ran out to the cab. At nine fifty, he let me out in front of the New Haven Coliseum. About twenty-five teenagers without tickets were milling around in the snow. I gave the driver two twenty-dollar bills, and ran through the kids.

“Where’s the stage?” I barked at the policeman at the door.

He looked at my old pass. “Down those stairs and to your right,” he said.

I hurried down the stairway, and in the direction the policeman had told me. I could hear our Christmas tape playing, the one that was used during the roadies’ equipment set-up. But it was too late for that; the band should have been on by now. I ran in the direction of the music, and passed an open locker room door.

There, playing cards inside, were Alice and Neal.

I was panting and sweating. I walked into the locker room.

“Hey!” Alice said. “Merry Christmas! Welcome back!”

“Why aren’t you on?” I said. “Ah, you know,” Alice said. “The usual fuckups. We should be going on in a couple of minutes.”

“Where you been?” Neal said.

Shep Gordon came through the doorway. “All right!” he said. “Libert was right! He said you’d make it. Just in time. Come on, it’s showtime.”

We all walked down the hallway. I climbed the stairs onto the stage. There, on the metal table, was a new timetable sheet for the Utica show, replacing the Binghamton information. Rebecca had left it there for me, in anticipation of my arrival.

Libert was on his way to the microphone at the center of the stage. He saw me and winked. He took a few steps in my direction and called, “I knew you were a trouper.”

“And now,” he yelled into the microphone, “in the midst of their fantastic holiday tour…”

I pulled myself up onto the metal table and sat down. The Amazing Randi handed me a pair of fresh earplugs. Neal smashed his sticks down onto the drums. I felt terrific.

NINETEEN

On the way to the airport in New Haven, Libert announced that we were no longer using the Starship. He and Shep had been unhappy with the long takeoff delays and constant minor complaints with the plane's service, and in a few days the Bob Dylan tour was contracted to take it over anyway, so for the rest of the trip we would be flying in a smaller charter. Actually, we now had two charters, Libert said—an extremely small one to carry some of the roadies, and a twenty-seater for the rest of us. The decision to change was already paying off, he said. Since the new plane was not a mammoth jet, we could fly out of the commuter field at New Haven, and save ourselves the hour's drive to Hartford that the Starship would have required.

But when we got to the airport, there were few words of joy. Mike Bruce was the first of us to spot the plane. "Oh, my God," he said. "A Jim Croce special."

The airplane was a tiny, skinny, two-engine puddle-jumper. It was painted white, a flying ballpoint pen. We all got out of the limousines and walked over to it. It was frightening-looking. It could have fit snugly under one of the Starship's wings. I climbed inside to check it out. There was not even room to stand up straight, and I had to half crawl down a narrow trickle of an aisle. There was only one seat on each side of that aisle. The plane did not have room for all of the baggage, of course; most of our suitcases would have to be trucked up to Montreal.

The Cooper travelers circled the airplane silently, afraid to say what they were thinking. Except for Alice.

He picked up a stick, and walked in front of one of the plane's propellers. He held the stick up to his mouth, in the manner of a television correspondent wielding a

microphone. He stared straight ahead at an imaginary TV camera, and said in mellifluous, dramatic tones:

“What began as a day of fun ended in tragedy Thursday as famous transvestite Alice Cooper and nineteen unidentified beatniks…”

The new plane got us to Montreal in relatively smooth fashion, and that afternoon, at the Hotel Bonaventure, Alice and I talked for more than three hours.

It was an unusual conversation, because it was serious from the start. During the course of the tour, I had found myself spending more time with Alice than with virtually anyone else in the traveling party. There was not a day when I did not pass hours and hours in his suite, watching TV and putting and drinking and waiting for showtime, or for mealtime, or for the sleepy urge to return to my own room and go to bed. For all his fame and box office power, he did not have much companionship on the road; the others in the band seldom stopped by for more than a few minutes, and the presence of Norm Klein scared away any local fans who might think about trying to drop in unannounced. And Alice did not like to leave his room, so there was never any chance for him to meet people on the street, or around the hotel. Most days when I would go to his suite, he and Norm would be alone with the afternoon game shows. Sometimes Shep would be there, and sometimes Libert, and Cindy Lang whenever she was on the tour. But the stereotypical scenario of the star surrounded by a fawning galaxy of stooges and admirers never materialized, and Alice often seemed lonely and bored and glad to have someone to kill the day with.

For all the hours that we had spent together, however, our conversations had never become too deep. That wasn’t Alice’s style; he *liked* staying mildly drunk and letting the television determine his thought processes. It was easier

that way. And besides, if we had devoted a lot of time to verbally analyzing the Cooper phenomenon, we would have found ourselves overstating the obvious within five minutes. I always got the impression that Alice would rather leave that kind of talking to strangers who were observing him for the first time—the realization that the demented image was a put-on, that he was a rather funny, pleasant, likable person, that he was far straighter than most of his audience, that the Alice Cooper persona was a brilliant business proposition and nothing more. Alice had been living with that knowledge for years, and every time I started to go into it during the tour, he seemed to lose interest, and to try to change the subject.

I could understand that. So much of Alice's life was devoted to promoting his public image that he had an almost physical need to get away from it for part of each day. And I could tell that when I would start questioning him about his career, he would become vaguely disappointed with me—as if I should know that I was breaking some unwritten rule by bringing it up, that I was invited to spend these private hours with him only with the tacit agreement that they were to be just that, private hours when he would not have to use up any energy thinking about the thing that had consumed his life for almost ten years.

So mostly we just hung out and, not surprisingly, it tended to get rather tedious at times. There is just so much TV-watching and golf ball-putting you can do without going stir crazy, and I had never met anyone with a greater tolerance for such drudgery than Alice, unless it was Norm. It was possible for me to like Alice, and to respect his shrewdness and ambition and genius for whetting the public's curiosity—and still to be amazed at how dull his daily life was. The nature of superstardom is that the bigger and more phenomenal the success of a performer, the less accessible

he will be to the outside world. And perhaps it was the very fact that Alice was so readily accessible to me on this tour that made me tend to forget the immensity of his fame and international notoriety; I was seeing so much of the private Alice that it always hit me almost as a shock when we would go on stage at night and I would witness once again the astounding near-riots that he provoked merely by walking into the spotlights.

So I began to honor the unspoken understanding that we seemed to have. I did not try to goad him into talking much about his life, and I went along with the premise that he just wanted someone to spend time with, in an atmosphere where he could relax and not have to think of flashy answers to formal questions.

But I always had the sense that one of these days he was going to feel like discussing such matters, and that my best bet would be to let him do it in his own time. I had seen him give enough glib, pat, quotable one-liners to reporters in every city we had played to know that, if he felt he was being interviewed, he could fake his way through it without putting down his beer. I figured that if I waited until he wanted to talk, it might be better. And on this afternoon in Montreal, he wanted to talk. Norm was out shopping, and Alice was alone when I came to his room. We watched a little TV, joked some about the flight up in the new airplane, discussed the New Haven show. And then Alice got up and did something I had never seen him do before, something that amazed me: he turned the television off.

“I know you think that I’ve been down on this tour,” he said. “There’s really no big, profound reason for it. I just wasn’t up for it. I’m naturally lazy. That long tour last spring just wore me out, and I still haven’t recovered from it. Not so much physically; I’m just tired of the same pretext over and over.”

I asked him if that was why he seemed to be holding back on the on-stage viciousness—not chopping the baby dolls, not going all out on the sick routines that had made him famous.

“Any more I’m really making a lot of fun of myself,” he said. “I’m just walking through it. I don’t even mind being a goof. I’m really so tired of that vicious role. I used to go out there and bring the hatchet down on the doll and I felt real devious about it. Not like I was deceiving anybody. But I felt it was a dark side of me coming out, you know? At the same time, though, I knew I was doing it well because it was working. I had a whole facial thing worked out. I was acting it. I was actually taking a role and getting meat out of it.

“The dead babies thing was more or less my invention. It was like, I just knew it was going to shock. Once you get a taste of what gets press, you get a feel for it, you can sense what’s going to work and what’s not. The notorious thing was working for us. My being so vicious seemed to magnetize the audience to the stage.

“Now I know that I can do it, and I want to stop. If I ever need to, I know that I can go on stage and make an audience believe me in that violent act. But it’s boring me. I’d like to change. I’d like to get comedy down to the point where I could get everybody to react as well as they do to the vicious thing. I’d like to get well rounded. After I mastered comedy, I’d like to be a romantic, and make everyone fall in love with me.”

I asked him if he thought the audience realized that he was laughing at himself on stage.

“No,” he said. “I don’t really think they know. I don’t even think they care. For some reason, people still think we’re shocking on stage. I pick up the paper and read how shocking our concert was, and I think, what are they talking

about? Don’t they see that it’s become a joke to me? I don’t even like being on stage for a live performance any more. I’ve had enough of this sordid stuff. I’d like to do films now, just change directions completely.”

I wondered if he thought people could accept him as anything other than the rock and roll monster they had been conditioned to expect?

“Yeah, sure, they just want to be entertained,” he said. “They just want to see a star. I’ll tell you the truth, I was always a star.

I was a star when I was a kid in school. I was the most popular kid in the class, always. Personality, the whole thing. Nobody hated me. I had very few enemies, and they couldn’t really be my enemies, because I had all the biggest guys on my side. The year I was a freshman, I was probably the most popular kid in the whole high school. Funny, fast-talking... the teachers loved me. They absolutely loved me. I had fast lines, and they knew that if they asked me a question, they were going to get an original answer out of me. Everybody knew I wasn’t a fighter. The girls liked me because I was cute. I wasn’t cute *physically*, but I was always pinching them on the ass and doing things like that.

“I was never insecure. I pretty much thought that I’d be a star when I was ten years old. I knew that no matter what I was going to do, I was going to do it like nobody else had done it. I didn’t care if that was selling insurance, or what—I knew I had that spark of imagination.”

I asked him if it was his imagination that had come up with the proposition that a repulsive, pseudo-faggot band would be a success.

“That most of all came from the press,” he said. “They picked up on little things, and people started to get turned on by this negative image, they were willing to stand in line and pay to see just what the hell this was that they’d been hearing about. We saw what was selling, and we built on it. Like the chicken thing. That was the very first thing that got us press, and it was ridiculous, it was the silliest thing in the world. I mean, it was something you wouldn’t even think about, and then the next day it was in every newspaper, and we were being talked about.

“I remember exactly how it was. We were in London, Canada, and we were playing with Zappa, and somebody threw a chicken on stage. We were playing outside, and there was a veranda there. And I picked the chicken up, and in all honesty I thought that chickens could fly. So I threw it up in the air, and it hit the top of the veranda, and it fell into the audience. And the audience just tore it to pieces. It was written about, and it got to the UPI. And the next thing I heard was that I had bitten the chicken’s neck open and sucked the blood out. So if people liked that, if they wanted to believe that... I’m not ashamed of anything we’ve done to build ourselves up, though. But I worry that people take it seriously. There are psychotic people who think that we’re serious.”

I said it was easy for him to say that now—but what would he have said several years ago, before all the success, if someone had asked him if his violence was serious? “I might have said yeah,” he said. “I was just learning what I was doing. I was so anxious to make it, and I might have said anything, because I was absolutely press crazy.”

I asked him what went through his head when he, a former Beatle-loving teenager, now found himself driving around Los Angeles with John Lennon.

“To me, that’s neat,” Alice said. “Five years ago, I would’ve went ‘Wow!’ but now I realize that I’ve gone through the same kind of experiences that the Beatles did. It’s sort of a fraternity, where you never have to have met the other rock and roll stars before, but you can just walk in and sit down and talk to them, because we’ve all gone through the same things. There are certain people I probably wouldn’t be able to meet, I’d be too nervous. Like Burt Bacharach. There are certain people who are still really enormous stars to me. People like Marlene Dietrich would flip me out. To meet people like that—because, see, they played another game, a game that I don’t even know. But I know the rock thing. We’ve all stayed at the same Holiday Inns, even the Beatles. We’ve all had to worry about getting searched in Customs; if you didn’t have anything, you’d worry about somebody planting it on you. I can understand that world.”

What about the feeling on stage? I asked him what he experienced when he walked out every night.

“A surge of power, basically,” he said. “When I get on stage, I feel that I *own* that stage. And no matter what I do, all those people are going to be looking at me. I am not one nth bit nervous on that stage. It’s like when I was a kid, like I told you—when I was in a classroom, I was on. It’s the same thing now. I get a little spark of tension before the show, but from the minute I step on that stage and the lights go on, it’s there, I know that I don’t have to worry about anything.”

I wondered about the girls in the audience. He invited their passion from the stage every night, but then he never saw any of them after the show. Why?

“It’s sort of a sadistic thing,” he said. “I’m a romantic more than a sex object. I wouldn’t be with Cindy if I wasn’t a real romantic. And I don’t like the idea of getting laid by a different chick every night, or even getting a blow job or

anything like that. That doesn't intrigue me, not at all. I enjoy turning the audience on. I have a whole love affair with my audience. With millions of people, who really do think Alice Cooper is neat. I love the idea of tantalizing them, just tempting them enough. Because they love it. Everybody likes to be teased, don't they?"

I asked if he ever thought he took himself too seriously.

"Oh, yeah, I do," he said. "Everybody does, at certain times. Every once in a while I catch myself playing star. I go to a baseball game in the summer, right? And I'll be all disguised, because I just want to watch the game and not be bothered. So I wear a fake mustache and tie my hair back and wear a hat. And I'll sit there for a few innings, and if I don't get noticed a couple of times, it starts worrying me. So I'll take the mustache off and sit there for a while. And then I'll start slowly stripping the disguise off because I get worried that no one's recognized me. So at the end of the game I've got my hair hanging down, and I'm going '*School's out...*' and the kids say, 'Look, it's him!' Listen. I'm a ham. I'm a natural showoff.

"I take complete advantage of my name. If I go to a place where it's hard to get reservations, I'll have whoever's calling for me say it's for Alice Cooper. If I'm going to a restaurant, I always say, 'Make sure they know, 'cause we'll get the best seat.' And we always do get the best seat. They say, 'Mr. Cooper, here's your seat.'"

I said I thought that was kind of surprising, since the entire thrust of the buildup of his name seemed to have been directed at identifying it with revulsion and shock.

"That was Phase One," Alice said. "Now it's beyond that. It's a household word. That's the great thing about being a celebrity. If you stand out of the norm, people admire you. It

doesn’t matter to them *why* they’ve heard of you. I can get into movie theaters without paying. I have somebody call up and say, ‘Listen, Alice Cooper’s in town for one night, and he wanted to catch your movie, but he doesn’t want anyone around, is your manager there?’ And when we show up, they say that the tickets are complimentary.”

I asked why he thought that happened. When the manager of a theater or a restaurant showed such deference to Alice Cooper, was the manager thinking that he was doing this for the young man who sang about the dead babies?

“No, he’s not,” Alice said. “All he’s thinking about is the fact that Alice Cooper’s got a name. And he’ll come up and say, 'Could you sign this for my daughter?’ and I’ll say, 'Oh, of course,’ and he’ll be thrilled. I love the idea that I’ve come up being just a kid who had his eyes set on something, and that I went even beyond what I set out to do. I know I’m going to go on into movies, and when I do. I’ll be going beyond what I’ve done already. That’s my incentive in life. I might just stop flat and try to become a golf pro. I never can tell what I really want to do. But if I did become a golf pro, I bet you that I’d get more publicity than anybody else. I can sing rock and roll as good as anyone, but that’s certainly not what I want to do for the next ten years. I’d like to endorse products. You can make just as much money endorsing as you can singing.”

I talked to him some about the resentments I’d seen in the rest of the group about the personal publicity he had been receiving, and asked him how conscious he was of the bad feelings.

“Well, I don’t know how to cope with that,” he said. “If a reporter comes in to do a story on the band, he doesn’t ever talk with the group. He comes right to me. Shep *wants* him to talk to me, because sometimes the others don’t

understand the psychology of what we're trying to do. So it's better to have one person talking for the group, focusing in on one thing, than having everybody else giving out different ideas. Shep and I, more or less, are the ones who navigated this whole thing, anyway.

"And I'll tell you, I'm better with the press, anyway. I was right from the beginning. I could make them laugh. I could make them think seriously for a second. I have a natural thing for that. I can sit down, and anybody who walks into this room, I can talk to. I can charm anybody. I know I can. That's just a gift. I could always charm my teachers into giving me grades when I didn't really deserve them. I was a natural con man. I was a Bilko.

"The newsmen are always expecting me to be a rotten guy when they come in, and they're surprised when I say, 'Hey, man, how are you!' Because I'm naturally like that. I don't put that on.

I really like people. Even when I'm feeling rotten, I can do it. That's because I'm a pro. You can't afford enemies in this business. I can't stay mad at anybody for longer than three minutes. I don't care if they hit me with a shovel."

I asked him about some of the more gruesome, morbid aspects of the stage show. Had he ever been exposed to real violence? Had he ever seen death?

"You know, that's funny," he said. "That's really true—I've never seen it. I've never really been in a fight. I've never seen a dead person. I hope I never have to, firsthand. That's probably why I make so much fun of death, because I've never really seen it. I can't remember the last time I cried, but the other night I had a dream that my dog Asta got hit by a truck, and I woke up, and I was crying. I'd been crying in my sleep. It felt so good. Just crying like crazy."

What about if a person in his audience got killed? Would he cry then?

“No,” he said, “that would scare me more than make me cry. I couldn’t see anything in the audience that would make me cry.” But what did he think when he saw the people in that front row passed out and being crushed as they were shoved against the barricade?

“Well, I usually think they’re dumb for being in the front row in the first place,” Alice said. “Usually only your masochists are up there. Because how crazy is that? They know what’s going to happen. I don’t really feel sorry for them because they can leave at any time. They can get out. If you really had to get out, you could get out. A lot of people who pass out, they’re just the drug addicts. Druggies, or people who drank too much, or it’s just too hot. I don’t know how to control that. I don’t ever take any responsibility for that because that’s not my job. I’m there to entertain. If that’s the way they’re going to react—that’s the way they’re going to react.”

I asked if the adulation from his fans ever surprised him.

“No, because that’s a pretty common denominator,” he said. “They’re all universal. They do the same thing in Japan. They do the same thing in Germany. I sit back and I can understand an adulation thing because when I was a kid, I had the same adulation thing for Elvis. For the Beatles. For the Rolling Stones. I used to pretend I was Ricky Nelson. I used to comb my hair like him. In junior high school I used to be Dion and Bobby Rydell. I was always an imitator.”

What about the name “Alice”? Did he plan on calling himself that forever?

“Lately I’ve been having people call me ‘Coop” he said. “I’m getting a little bit of a complex from being called Alice. It worked, it got publicity, but now... I mean, it doesn’t even sound feminine any more. For some reason, it doesn’t have any feminine connotation. I don’t know, it’s just developed into a strong name. I’ll probably stay with it as a public name. But they called Gary Cooper ‘the Coop,’ and they call John Wayne ‘Duke.’ When people say to me, ‘Hey, it’s the Coop,’ I like that, because it’s me.

“To me, I would rather be a universal personality than just a rock group. Groucho Marx gave a really nice line about us, and so did Bob Hope on TV. Jack Benny was really nice to me when I met him. He knew who I was, because I get mentioned in the *Hollywood Reporter* and all the same magazines he gets mentioned in. He is such a pro. For seventy years he’s been a pro. And he looks at me, and he says, ‘Well, you know, you’re a performer and you’re getting more press than I am. So obviously you’re not just a rock performer.’ You see, Jack Benny understands what I’m trying to do.”

I asked if that was not slightly dangerous—to have the rock and roll pervert identified with famous standard American entertainment stars. Might the young kids stop believing in Alice if they saw him with Jack Benny and George Burns too many times?

“Yeah, I have to keep thinking about that,” he said. “I have to stay just on the shady side of things. On the blue side—not black. It’s still there. People still talk about us and think that we’re whipping fifteen groupies in the hotel room. That’s good.

“I don’t want to kill that image completely. Once you kill all that mystery, you’re in trouble. That’s why Shep won’t let me go on Johnny Carson. Because he thinks it would kill the

Alice Cooper mystery. I'd love to do the Carson show, but once you're on there, they've got you, they've got a picture of you without your eye makeup on. That's the only way I'd go on there. No eye makeup, dressed like I do off stage. I'd be real witty and funny and everything. But Shep says, 'Do you know how many people that's going to turn off? People who still want you to be the bad guy?' So I won't do it yet. I'll wait until I start doing movies, and then I'll go on Carson.

"Any actor is a good salesman. Marlon Brando refers to the acting job as just another job, and he says he's a good salesman. It's what I do on stage. I sell a story. I sell the idea that I'm going through this anguish, or whatever it is in the role. I know Madison Avenue cats who would be just terrific actors. I'm always thinking about what I'm going to be doing after this. I'm always trying to figure how I can use what I'm doing now for later. Like if I meet a person, later on he might be able to help me. When I need him. If there's a role that comes up in a movie, then I'll need all these movie people who I'm meeting now through being a rock and roll star. If a role comes up and the guy considers me for it, then okay, I've got an in with somebody."

I asked if tour life was becoming less and less pleasant for him.

"I don't like sitting by myself in the afternoons," he said. "For some reason, it's the afternoons that get to me. Just about this time of day, my nerves would start getting bad if there wasn't somebody around. The only time I really like to be alone is in the mornings, when I wake up and turn the TV on. Because I need about two hours to start feeling good. I'll sit there and drink three beers and watch the quiz shows.

"I must be an alcoholic. I talked to a doctor, and he said there's such a thing as a beeraholic. For publicity, I always say that I drink a case a day. But I don't drink any case a

day. If I drink all day, maybe twelve beers, that's a lot, and that's just two six-packs. All right. But I even went to my doctor and said, 'Check everything on me,' and he said that I was the healthiest one in the group. He asked me if I took vitamins, and I said no, but I did drink twelve beers a day, and he said 'Well, that could hurt some people, but for you, it must really help your metabolism.' I sip. I've been drinking this beer here for an hour. I wouldn't want to go without it, though, because it'd be like somebody trying to go without cigarettes. It's a nervous habit I have right now.

"You see, I used to drink two fifths of whisky a day. That was when we were first starting this Alice Cooper thing, and I was really feeling pressured. I was getting up in the morning and having two or three whiskeys before I'd even get on the plane. And drinking straight through the day. I got to the point where I was like in a V.O. coma. I'd be lying in the room asleep at four o'clock in the afternoon, and they couldn't wake me till eight o'clock. And then Shep came to me and said. 'Hey, I have to tell you something. Your drinking's getting to be a real problem. You're losing your personality.' And when Shep said that to me, I went, 'Whooah.' And I just stopped. I drink beer, and no whisky until late at night. And no dope. I just don't believe in that."

I asked him if the constant pampering he received from his employees robbed him of the feeling that he was a grown adult.

"Well, I don't feel like I'm twenty-five," he said. "Right now, if I sat down, I don't even know how to write a check. I've always been sheltered from anything like that. I have so little responsibility. That's what kind of keeps me young. To think that when I was sixteen I didn't know how to write a check, and now I'm twenty-five and I still don't know how to write a check. I'm the sort of person where I think I'll always

have someone to do things for me. People have a natural mothering attitude toward me. They always do things. I can't open the door for myself. I walk in a room and just put my arms out, and the coat's on, and I don't even have to button it. Everybody does everything for me all the time. But I like that now—it's sort of like conning your way through life. It was always like that. I never had to do anything. And I never worried about it. I just said, 'Well, gee, I don't care, let them do it for me.'

"There have been a few times when I've had to fend for myself. I was stuck in an airport once, and I didn't even know how to get a ticket. And I sat there, and I thought, 'How do I go about this?' And I did it, and I said to myself, 'Wow, I got my own ticket!'

"Cindy does everything for me. I'll be in bed, and it's pay day, and she knows that there are bills. I'll say, 'Cindy, just go pick up the check and cash it and pay the bills. You know I can't put up with trivial things like that. I'm too busy planning the next publicity stunt.' I think that's one of the attributes of being a star. You have to be like that. I can barely wash my hands. I rebel against having to do anything. So anything that can be done for me so that I don't have to do it, I'll take advantage of it. I would never be able to get up every day and make a living in a normal way. It would drive me nuts. I don't even like the idea of scheduled rehearsals at the same time every day."

I asked him if he ever thought generally about America, and what it meant to him.

"Well, the main thing is, our band is the epitome of everything that's American," he said. "We've got the American dream, in the way that we've worked our way from starving to being rich. We like girls with big tits, which is typically American. You can't find anybody in the group

who'll eat gourmet food. Hamburgers, cheeseburgers, you know, McDonald's, Jack-in-the-Box—everything that's typically American for this period of time, we are. Beer, football—everything.

"I wouldn't live any other place. There's no place as much fun as America. I don't care what they say about Europe, Japan, or any place. America is... look at how much freedom we have! I would fight for the freedom of America, if it came down to fighting.

"People who say America is morally bankrupt—I don't think that's true. I think that's really an enormous generalization. I think if you get right down to it, the bad things are going to get much more publicity than the good things. America does one thing bad and it's going to get ten times the publicity as something good.

"America loves stars. It's part of the American way. That's one of the reasons that our group could make it. Billy the Kid was a rotten guy, you know. He never drew on another man—he always walked up behind the guy and shot him in the head. Look at Dillinger. Those people were bloody killers. They were really murderers, but they were heroes. When they arrested Dillinger the first time, there were protests, because he was thought of as a Robin Hood. Baby Face Nelson—all those people—they were glorified. I don't think that the Germans consider Hitler a hero. But America certainly does consider those gangsters heroes, Al Capone, people like that. Because they caused excitement in their time. Look at us. Who was the villain in rock and roll before we came along? There was absolutely nobody that was filling any villain role at all. And all of a sudden, there we were.

"You know something? I'm not that down on Nixon. I think Nixon's got a rough job. And if he's guilty of anything, I

don’t think it’s anything new. He’s just the first one to get caught.

“I think Nixon’s a star. He wouldn’t be getting that much publicity if he wasn’t a star. And he’s a *real* star. He’ll go down as one of the biggest personalities ever to come out of the United States, just by being so notorious. I think I could sit down and talk with Nixon. He’s a diplomat, just like myself. He could sit down and talk with anybody—even if he didn’t like them, he could talk to them. He’d probably be extremely charming.

“I would love to spend some time with him. I’d probably sit down and talk about golf. I wouldn’t talk political to him because I don’t know anything about politics. I’m sure he knows who I am. He’s a reader, isn’t he? He has to look at *Time* magazine, so he’s read about me. There was a poster of me being hung from a noose, up in the White House kitchen. One of the guys from *Time* or *Newsweek*, told me that. He said one of the young cooks in the White House kitchen has my poster up there. I wouldn’t doubt it. They must have kids working there.

“I think I would be able to sit down and talk to Nixon just like anybody else. You know: ‘Use a four wood in this situation, things like that. He wouldn’t talk about rock music, and I wouldn’t talk about politics. I didn’t vote last time. I feel ashamed that I didn’t. I wouldn’t have voted for McGovern. Just for the main fact that he kept changing his mind so many times.

“I don’t know if Nixon consciously thinks of himself as a star. I think he just does it by instinct. Now Kissinger, he tries to pull it off very consciously, and he pulls it off well. He’s a star in two or three different ways. You know, with the ladies, he patched the whole world up—look at the guy. He’s a Superman, and he’s got all the chicks after him, and he’s not

good looking. He's just another cat. If you saw him on the street corner, you'd say, 'Who's that guy?' I'd love to sit down with him, too. You know, my best class in high school was government. I was number one in my class in government. I always read *Time* magazine, and when there was current events, I knew everything. I knew who the president of Kenya was."

I asked him if he had ever envisioned the day when he would be one of the most famous names in the world, and would be traveling around North America with a bodyguard, staying in two-level suites and riding in limousines.

"That's exactly what we were aspiring to," he said. "And it was just the fact that 'we're going to do it—I don't care what you say, we're going to do it. I don't care if you try to stop us, we're going to do it.' It was nothing but positive thinking. I'm very competitive. I always have been. I don't like the idea of anyone being better than me at anything. That's my main life drive—being better than everyone else.

"The whole thing was timing. We came at the right time. We came right before the sexual revolution really took off. We were just enough to be outrageous at the beginning, and then we followed it up. The Alice Cooper name. And now it's a household word. Everybody knows who Alice Cooper is—all the housewives, all the Archie Bunkers. Now they can even accept the fact that I'm not queer, but that doesn't matter, anyway. All they know is that whoever this Alice Cooper is, he's commercial. He sure used it. That's the way they think about me. It sure worked. All of it sure worked."

I told Alice that, just before I had come to his room, I had been down in the lobby of the hotel. An older woman had heard me talking to the desk clerk, and she had come up and asked if I was traveling with the Alice Cooper group. I had said yes, and she had started to shake, she was so

upset. She had turned a deep shade of red. She said that her grandson was an Alice Cooper fan, and that we ought to be ashamed of ourselves for what we were doing to the young people of the world. She said that anyone who would associate with Alice Cooper was sick and dangerous, and did not belong in the same society with civilized people. She asked me why I didn't go back to America, and leave the Canadian children alone. And then—she handed me a piece of paper, and asked me to fake Alice's signature, so that she could give it to her grandson as a gift.

Alice did not laugh. He merely nodded his head. "That's it, right there," he said. "If Richard Speck was here, she'd get his autograph, too. And if Charles Manson was here, she'd get his autograph. It doesn't matter whether they hate you or not. All that matters is that they know you. If you can keep them thinking about you, you've got it made."

TWENTY

It was in Montreal that everyone in the traveling party came to realize that the tour was as good as over. We would be spending two days in Canada, and then do the final shows in Utica and Buffalo before going our separate ways. There was no real air of great sadness; it was more a kind of stoic recognition that the job looked like it was going to be completed successfully. Still, all during our time in Quebec, there was an unmistakable feeling that we were into the denouement.

I walked into a fancy unisex clothing store on the arcade level of our hotel. Standing in front of a three-way mirror was Donny Arnold, the nineteen-year-old roadie from North Carolina. He was trying on a black velvet overall suit, complete with a bib and straps. A year before, he had been hunting up odd jobs around Fayetteville, for whatever money he could scrounge. Now here he was, posturing in a Montreal boutique, drawling his fitting instructions while three salesgirls chattered in French and giggled over him.

“You like this?” he asked me. I’m thinking of buying it for Europe. I don’t suppose I’d wear it on the street, but it’d look pretty cool on the stage every night, don’t you think? There’s pockets in the front for my tools, and everything.”

I said that I thought it looked fine, but that I hadn’t heard anything about the band going to Europe.

“No, I guess Cooper won’t be going over there right away,” Donny said. “But if they don’t, someone will. I’ll get over there some way. I heard that the Allmans were going next month. Maybe I’ll go with them. I’ll find some band.” The rock and roll road was already his only home.

The Bonaventure was by far the loveliest hotel we had stayed in during the tour. It was located on the top level of a modem office building, high above the noise of the street; there was a heated outdoor swimming pool that was open even in the middle of a snowstorm. The rooms were lavish and gorgeous, and the hotel's amenities included a sauna bath and twenty-four-hour room service. The waiters and bellmen were gracious and courteous. Down on the street level, there was a fabulous, amazingly diverse arcade featuring every kind of shop imaginable.

It was a pleasure to be at the hotel, and we were all puzzled about a news story we had read just before arriving. It seemed that The Who had been staying at the Bonaventure during their just-completed tour, and that they had done some six thousand dollars' damage to one of the suites. Destruction by traveling bands was far from unheard of, but none of us could imagine why anyone would want to demolish such a beautiful, friendly, service-oriented hotel.

There was a young woman in her early twenties who worked behind the front desk, and as she left the hotel for the day I stopped her and asked her about The Who's stay at the Bonaventure. It turned out that she was a transplanted American.

"I was on vacation in Barbados when they were here," she said. "But man, I wish I would have been working that week. I would have gone into that suite and helped them rip it up. I wish they would have bombed the place. This fucking hotel. It's run by a bunch of up-tight capitalists. I wish those guys would have wrecked *all* their rooms."

Another one caught up in the romance that rock and rollers were third world revolutionaries whose only goal in life was to share all of the earth's wealth. If she could have sat down with Neal Smith for five minutes, she would have thought

she was talking to H. L. Hunt. That night, I saw her hanging around backstage at the show, hoping to get picked up and taken back to her own hotel.

Norm Klein finally got his chance.

Late on the afternoon of our arrival, Alice was sleeping in his suite. I had already gone back to my own room. Norm was down at the hotel's newsstand.

Two scraggly-looking young men walked up to the front desk. One of them said to the clerk on duty, "I'm Alice Cooper, and I lost my key. Could you get me another one?"

"What room are you in?" the clerk said.

"I don't even know," the young man said. "We stay in so many places..."

The clerk hesitated. The rules were, no local calls were to go through to Alice Cooper's suite. But there were no instructions on how to deal with a situation like this, and the young man *did* look like a rock and roll musician, and if it really *was* Alice Cooper, and Mr. Cooper was locked out of his room, then it wouldn't do to keep him waiting around. The clerk handed over a key. The two young men walked off.

Norm Klein was strolling down the hallway to his and Alice's suite when he saw the two men in front of the door.

"Hey!" Norm said. "What are you doing?"

The one young man had the key in the lock, and he was turning it. He ignored Norm.

"Hey!" Norm shouted.

The man pulled the key from the lock, and he and his friend started to run down the corridor. Norm caught up with them, and floored one of them with a single crack to the jaw. The second made it to the elevator, and headed downstairs.

By this time Shep Gordon was in on the chase. He and Norm and some hotel security men stopped the second young man on the arcade level of the Bonaventure. The two men said that they had heard that Alice Cooper was in town, and they had just wanted to see him.

The Montreal police were called, and on Shep's request the men were locked in jail for the next forty-eight hours, until we were out of Canada. Shep was worried about the possibility of Alice being kidnapped, and he didn't want the two young men to come back again—or even to be given the opportunity to tell other people the number of the room where Alice was staying. Norm was in a buoyant mood after his knockout.

Alice was not told about the incident.

On the way to the Montreal Forum, the Amazing Randi kept badgering Alice to add a special touch for the French-Canadians.

"Come on, Alice, it'd bring down the house," Randi said. On I'm Eighteen,' say '*dix-huit*' where you usually say 'eighteen.' They'll love it."

"Ah, I don't know," Alice said. "I can't talk French. I'd sound stupid."

"It's simple," Randi said. "Don't think of it as French. Think of it as two English words. It's 'Dese Wheat.' You know how gangsters say 'dose guys and dese guys'? Okay, 'dese' is the

first word. And the second word is ‘wheat,’ just like wheat in a field.”

“I’ll never remember it,” Alice said.

“I’ll take care of everything,” Randi said.

And so, as the roadies set up the equipment just before we went on, Randi was kneeling at the front of the stage with a piece of chalk, writing, in huge letters, ‘DESE WHEAT,’ facing Alice’s microphone. When it got to be time for ‘I’m Eighteen,’ Alice stared down at the floor in front of him, and sang the French lyric. There were 18,201 fans in the audience, and all of them managed to ignore his piece of Tony Bennett showmanship, which did seem a bit stilted for a rock and roll show, much less an Alice Cooper show. But the Amazing Randi was in ecstasy, clapping his hands and clicking his heels and jumping about as he stood next to me at stage left and witnessed Alice using his gimmick.

I watched the show, and I knew that there was a big grin all over my face, and I realized once again how much I loved rock and roll music. Still loved it, fifteen years and more after Elvis on Sullivan. All this time, and still it was the only thing I knew of that was guaranteed to make me happy, no questions asked. Would I ever outgrow it? Dennis Dunaway looked over and saw me laughing with joy from the music, and he understood; he had been out there in his driveway, after all, pretending to be Duane Eddy, and so he understood it very well. He grinned back at me and swung his bass guitar up and down, exaggerating the beat, showing me that he comprehended exactly what I was thinking. I never wanted the tour to end, never wanted to spend another night without hearing more rock and roll. Never wanted the music to stop.

Two hours after the show, in Alice's suite, six of us were eating room-service cheeseburgers. The talk had arrived at the standard, bland subjects of sex and drugs.

"You ever fuck on acid?" Neal Smith said to no one in particular. "Whew! Un-be-lievable!"

"What about eating mushrooms?" Mick Mashbir said. "Talk about a twelve-hour high with no time distortion."

Bobby Dolin shook his head. "Yeah, sex on acid's great," he said. "But I hate that, when people slip it to chicks and don't tell them what they're taking. Slipping acid to a person without telling them should be a crime."

"But what a great way to fuck!" Neal said. "I'm kind of sorry that I've straightened out. Fucking on acid, man, what fun! Clean your tubes right out!"

"Sunshine's really good for sex," volunteered a young woman who had managed to gain access to the suite, and who had been keeping quite still until this moment.

Alice, in a dressing gown, was sitting silently, and he seemed to feel left out of the conversation. As Neal expanded the scope of his praise for LSD intercourse, Alice turned to me and said quietly, "Have you ever tried that stuff? I don't think I'd like it. I'd get paranoid. What if they gave me too much of a dose? Think of sex on acid. My heart goes 'boom-boom-boom' now, I have to say 'stop' before I have a heart attack. Think what LSD would do to me! Sometimes I feel like an old man."

Later that night, Mike Bruce walked into a small party that was going on in one of the roadies' rooms. A sixteen-year-old girl said to him, "Are you in the band?"

Mike closed his eyes for a brief moment. Then he let out a short laugh, and began to wag his finger at the girl, and to lecture her, in the manner of a junior high school biology teacher. “Young lady,” he said, “if you are going to be a groupie, you are simply going to *have* to learn the names of members of the groups!”

The day after the Montreal concert was free, and most of the tour people wandered around town on their own, relaxing and seeing the city.

Outside of a men’s store, I ran into David Libert and a young lady of his recent acquaintance. Libert had just bought a $135 overcoat in the store, because his old one had been stolen at the Montreal Forum during the show. As we talked, an elderly man who appeared to be a deaf-mute approached us. He held out his hand, in which he was carrying a small assortment of tin trinkets.

Libert selected one, and handed it to his woman friend. Then he dug into the pocket of his old blue jeans, and pulled out a roll containing at least five thousand dollars. He peeled off two ones, handed them to the man, and returned the roll to his jeans. The old man stared at Libert in disbelief, refusing to accept the fact that this street corner hippie was carrying all that money. The man put his hand to his face and shook his head again and again. We walked down the block, and when I turned around to look, the old man was still watching us and shaking his head.

Montreal was full of clothes shops that featured the freaky, outlandish, glittery fashions that Alice Cooper had first made popular on stage, and which had since become acceptable street attire for the young and hip. There were tiny spangled shrink tee shirts, and see-through blouses for men, rainbow-colored boots with six-inch heels, and denim jackets covered with sequined stars and stripes. All of the stores seemed to

be doing a brisk business, and judging from the attire of the young people around town, the sleazo fop look was very much in vogue.

When I got back to the hotel, I stopped by Alice's suite. He and Norm were watching television, and I told them about the clothing stores.

"Yeah, I know," Alice said. "I bought some clothes today."

"What did you get?" I asked him.

He smiled at Norm. "Should I?" Alice said.

"Sure," Norm said. "Go ahead."

"Okay," Alice said. "But don't tell the others."

He went up to his bedroom, which was at the top of a winding staircase. He was gone for about five minutes. Then I heard him call, "Okay."

I looked at the stairs. He came down wearing his purchase of the day. It was a gray flannel suit, cut very conservatively and severely. "It was the only thing I saw that I could stand," he said.

Neal and I were having a drink at the hotel bar that evening, and he seemed a little depressed, which was unusual for him. I asked him what was bothering him.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I was just thinking. On Christmas day, I called my father. It's been on my mind ever since.

"My parents split when I was little. We were living in Akron, and when they split my sister and I went to Arizona with my mom, and my dad stayed in Ohio. I never saw much of him.

He hated longhairs and all that, and so when I started with the band, that kind of ended any hope of us ever getting together.

“Still, I was his only son, and I thought about him a lot. When I was in high school, I wasn’t real popular, I didn’t have very many friends, and I would have liked to have known my father. But that was impossible, because he and my mom didn’t have what you’d call one of your friendly divorces.

“Four years ago, when the band was just starting to get a name, I decided to call him on the phone and say hello. I thought he might have heard about us, and maybe he was proud. I should have known better, because of the rep we were building, and all. But I called him, and all he said to me was, ‘I have no son.’

“So I hadn’t talked to him since then. But remember in Toledo, when some of my relatives were there? Well, they told me that my dad had been following my career, that he bought all of our records, and he read about us in the magazines and everything. And they said that they thought he probably secretly felt thrilled about how well I’d done. By now, all the little kids in the family have real long hair, and I’m kind of the family hero, and they told me that my dad must realize that times have changed.

“So on Christmas day I called him. I said ‘Hi, Dad, this is Neal.’ And we talked. It was really nice. I think he can accept me now, and what I’m doing. I mean, what can he say, with all the success I’ve had? It felt really odd, coming off the tour and calling my dad in Akron. I don’t know why I’ve been thinking about it so much.”

I asked Neal what his father did in Akron.

He shook his head. “I don’t know,” he said. “Four years ago he was a foreman in one of the rubber factories. But now I don’t know if he’s still there, or what. Isn’t that something? I don’t even know what my own father does for a living.”

Around midnight, Libert called the rooms. We were all going to a night club called La Sexe Machine; we were to meet in the lobby in fifteen minutes, and then go over to the club in limousines.

When I got to the elevator, Norm and Alice were already waiting for it. “I wish Libert wouldn’t make such a production of these things,” Alice said. “Why does he have to get a whole entourage up? Why can’t we just go to the club, have a drink, and come back? Marlon Brando’s on in *The Wild One* on the late movie tonight, and I’d like to see it.”

“I know,” Norm said. “But David wants to make this something special for the roadies, and it wouldn’t be the same if you didn’t show up. He wants to make it something that everyone does together.”

So the entire Cooper tour journeyed to La Sexe Machine. It was a showplace of meticulously jaded seventies decadence. It was a small dancing-and-drinking club. The seats were cushions made of a flesh-colored foam rubber, with the patterns shaped like breasts and buttocks. The idea was, all you had to do was reach down and fondle a lifelike simulation of a human body part. Next to the tables, instead of railings, there were big wooden statues in the shapes of erect penises, complete with holes drilled in the tops. The waitresses were nude, except for G-strings; the waiters wore only jock straps.

The *maitre d’* wore a dinner jacket, and male customers were required to wear coats and ties. Which gave the place an air of the ridiculous, of course; here was this room full of naked

waiters and phony body parts, and the patrons were all forced to be dressed to the teeth. When we arrived, none of us were wearing jackets or ties, and naturally the regulations were waived. Several of the best tables had been kept open for us, even though there was a line of potential patrons waiting to get in. La Sexe Machine was becoming one of Montreal's hot clubs, and to have a drop-in by Alice Cooper, who epitomized what all of this stood for, was worth a year's supply of heavy advertising. The word would spread: when Cooper was in Montreal, he came here.

We were led with great fanfare to our tables. Alice sat with his back to the wall, and looked out into the room, Walter Winchell at the Stork Club. A black waiter came over to shake Alice's hand and to start taking orders. Even here, Alice would accept only a sealed bottle of V.O., so that he could pour it himself and be sure that no one was trying to kill him.

Our tables were the center of attention, but we were surprisingly subdued and non-rowdy. Mostly, it was just mellow, end-of-the-tour reminiscing, with roadies and managers and performers all sitting together and having a quiet good time. No one talked much about our surroundings; they were so awful and dumb that they did not even require a putdown. We drank for hours, with Shep picking up the tab for everyone. If the other patrons of La Sexe Machine were waiting for a rock and roll bacchanal, they were disappointed. We became duller as the hour got later, and for all the nostalgic talk of past cities on the tour, we might have been a World War II infantry unit reliving past glories.

The music in the club was from a record player, and near the end of the night, "Angie" by the Rolling Stones came on. Andy Mills told the other roadies that he, for one, was going

to dance. He got up in his black tee shirt, displayed his English accent while asking one of the local women to dance, and took her out onto the floor. As he danced, the rest of us watched. Then Alice began to sing along with Jagger's voice, changing the words to the sad song: "Andy, oh Andy, ain't it time to say goodbye…"

Michael Bruce picked it up, and then the rest of us joined in. Andy smiled as we sang to him, and the other customers thought that perhaps the riot was coming at last. But it was almost melancholy; it was another reminder that the tour was ending. We sang until the record was over, and within five minutes we were out on the street, waiting in the snow for the limousines to circle the block and pick us up.

In the morning, we flew to Utica in the little airplane. The flight was a treacherous, shaky one, and there were several of us who were more than a little frightened. The Amazing Randi wasn't helping matters any; his non-stop noisemaking, which under normal circumstances could become annoying enough, became maddening in the context of our cramped, turbulent flight.

"Who's got a doughnut?" he yelled for the sixth time as we bounced through the clouds. "I'm hungry. I didn't have breakfast. Who's got a doughnut?"

"Pull one out of your goddamn hat," Glen Buxton said.

But Randi would not be silenced. On this plane, the air blower-nozzles were located not above the seats, but to the sides, by each window. Randi found that by turning his nozzle on full blast, and then cupping his hand over it, he could simulate the sound of engine trouble. He thought this was great fun, but for those of us who were nervous anyway, it was pretty bad.

Cindy Smith was sitting in the seat behind Randi, and she was edgy because of the plane. She bit her lip for a while, but finally she angrily shook Randi's seat and said, "Will the *obnoxious* people on the plane please *stop it?* I mean it, Randi."

Randi turned around. "For that," he said, "you will never walk again."

He was subdued for the rest of the flight. When we landed in Utica, we could see the Customs men, their arms crossed, waiting sternly at examining tables for us, out in the cold. Going into Montreal, there had been no Customs check at all. "I think we're back in America," said Mick Mashbir. "Why is it that my own country is the only place we ever go into where I feel like a foreigner?"

The plane stopped, and we all prepared to get out. But when Cindy Smith stepped into the aisle, she tripped and stumbled, and had to steady herself on a seatback in order to keep from falling.

"Goddamn you, Randi!" she shouted.

The Amazing Randi cackled and rubbed his hands together. For an old pro like him, it had been the simplest of tricks. He had merely reached in back of him during the flight, and tied Cindy's shoelaces together.

TWENTY-ONE

We were news in every city we hit; that was axiomatic. But when we came to a town like Utica, New York, we were more than merely news, we were the top local event of the week, perhaps of the month. Utica was not a normal tour stop for the giant traveling bands, and when a group of the stature of Alice Cooper arrived, the occasion was worth six pictures in the local paper, including three on Page One, plus several separate news and feature stories adding up to almost a full page of type. We were in Utica on a fluke; when Binghamton had fallen through, we had needed a makeup date, and Utica had made an offer. But to the townspeople, the reason was not important. All that mattered was that one of the biggest rock and roll bands in the world was, for some reason, performing in the little Utica Memorial Auditorium tonight—Saturday night in Utica, and here was Alice Cooper.

When we got to our motel, I went back down to the lobby after finding my room and making sure that my bags got delivered. I knew that our two limousine drivers would be sitting there, waiting to get instructions, and I wanted to ask them about the city.

Don Dorr was the man who had driven the car in which I had ridden from the airport. He was a pleasant-voiced, handsome man in his mid-thirties. I sat down with him in the lobby, and said that I wondered what kind of crowd we'd be drawing for the show.

"You'll have the remaining youth of Utica at your concert tonight," he said. "They get out of town early, if they're smart. I can't say too much good about our town. Up here, a day is like a month. This city has the highest unemployment rate in New York State, and the highest tax rate. I'm an industrial cleaner salesman, that's my regular job. But I take time off at the Christmas season, and my father-in-law over

there owns these cars, and he asked me to do this driving. I like the idea of getting to meet Mr. Cooper, anyway. It's not often that something like this happens in Utica, so I'm glad to be able to be a part of it. Like I said, the ones who have any sense get out of the city and go somewhere else. But I have a wife here, my life is here, so I don't have much choice."

Dorr's father-in-law, a florid-faced man named Kenny Kunkel, said, "Don's right. This town is going to pot. The population was a hundred thousand not so long ago, but now it's down to eighty thousand, and it'll probably get worse. It's hard to keep the good kids in town. Nothing for them to stay for. I don't usually do this kind of driving; I use my cars mainly for funeral work. I've had three heart attacks, and I wanted to turn this job down. But I felt that it was my civic duty to say yes. They needed the cars and the drivers, and when a group like this Alice Cooper comes to town, and all the kids seem to be excited about it, then that's good for Utica. To tell you the truth, I'd rather not be working today. But I try to be a good citizen, and if driving Mr. Cooper around is going to help the town, then I'll take the time to do it."

Norm Klein came down a flight of stairs from Alice's second-floor suite. "Excuse me," he called to the desk clerk. "But our instructions weren't followed. We need a color TV in both rooms of our suite. There's only a TV in one of them. Could we have another television?"

Norm was assuming that kind of duty more frequently during the later stages of the tour. Originally, he had been assigned only as a bodyguard and baggage handler, but after he had started complaining about the baggage job early in the trip, that had been lifted. Now, of course, he saw himself mostly as a manservant and jovial companion to Alice—and the others, who had resented it enough when he

was a plain bodyguard, were absolutely seething now that they realized that Alice actually had been given an all-around Man Friday. Mike Bruce or Neal Smith would knock on Alice's door, and Norm would stand in the doorway and stare at them in silence, as if they had to present a legitimate, acceptable reason to enter. For people who had been friends and musical partners of Alice's since high school, that type of treatment began to smart. One day Mike Roswell came to the Cooper-Klein suite with a message about the show, and Norm made him go around to a second doorway, just on principle. Norm had also begun to counteract Libert's orders at the arenas, often telling Alice when he should or should not go to the limousines—a minor problem on a continuum of world crises, but nevertheless harrowing to Libert, whose job it was to keep the group moving together, and the tour on schedule. To make matters worse, the word had spread that Norm was being paid four hundred and twenty-five dollars a week—two hundred more than the average roadie, three more than Rebecca Segal. And when the other performers saw the roadies and Rebecca working twenty-hour days, and then saw Norm popping open beer cans for Alice and chasing errant golf balls on the carpet, the comments tended to get somewhat bitter. Norm was still oblivious to all of this, though, and breezed right on through.

"I'll just take this one," Norm said, and unplugged the color television set that was sitting in the lobby.

"No, please, don't," the desk clerk said. "We need that one here. We'll get you one from another room."

Norm shrugged his shoulders. "Well, all right," he said. "But it is absolutely necessary that Alice has both televisions right away. Otherwise, I'll just have to take this one."

I wanted to see the roadies at work one more time before the end of the tour. So in mid-afternoon I took a limousine to the hall. Nothing had changed; they were still a perfect machine, throwing that gargantuan, unwieldy stage together in an almost miraculously smooth and unruffled manner. And Larry Hitchcock was still the perfect boss, supervising their labor with a civility and good humor that spoke more of a college English literature classroom than a sweaty loading dock, but which worked so well that I could imagine him coolly and wryly taking charge of the construction of a 110-story skyscraper.

About an hour after I got to the hall, Hitch gave the roadies a meal break. They climbed up into the arena seats, and ate catered fried chicken and strawberry cheesecake. One more after this one, and they were done.

“I just want to get to the Bahamas and sit in the sun,” said Ronnie Volz, pulling his hair back from his face and tucking it into the back of his collar. “My girlfriend’s going to meet me down there the day after the tour ends, and I’m not going to move for a week. I’m not even going to think. Just sit there and feel that sun.”

Tony Mazzucchi grunted through a mouthful of cheesecake. “If they told us that we had to do one more show, I’d be pissed off,” he said.

“Why?” said Ralph Cafuoco. “We could do it.”

“We could *do* anything,” Volz said. “But our minds are set that we only have to do two more shows counting this one, and if Shep decided to add some more at the end, then each one after Buffalo, we’d be low.”

Mazzucchi nodded. “You’re right,” he said. “Let’s finish setting the stage up, call the band, do the show without the

crowd, pack up, and get out of here."

The crew soon went back to work. Artie King told me that he would give me a lift to the motel in ten minutes or so, as soon as he had made some final adjustments on his sound board. I took a walk around the inside of the arena while I waited for him, and when I got to the front door, I saw that the teenagers of Utica were already starting to form at the entrance. And at the head of the crowd, pressing against the glass double doors, determined to be the first one in, was a girl who made me sad as soon as I saw her.

Her face was pock-marked and flat and entirely unpretty. Her body was puffy. She was perhaps eighteen years old, and on any other day in Utica, she would have stood out only as being unattractive and lonely-looking. But this was going to be her night. She had glued glitter all over her face and hair. She wore tiny pink shorts over a pair of black tights, and a sparkly pair of stacked heels. She was wearing a tight pink leotard top, and across the top of it she had written in sequins, "Billion Dollar Babies." And here she was, waiting. I remembered old news pictures I had once seen of the young Frank Sinatra, surrounded on the street by plump, unattractive girls who lived for his voice, and who fantasized that he someday would single them out. But if those girls were unappealing to the boys in their own towns, of course, they would never stand a chance with Sinatra. They were merely the troops, the ones who dreamed the dreams, and bought the records, and stood in line for the tickets, and ran for the autographs. We were in a different age now, but this was the same girl, thirty years later. I looked at her, so pitiful in her spangled getup, unable to hide her loneliness behind the glitter, and I thought of how she must sit in her room at night and look at the album covers, and listen to the voice of Alice Cooper. I thought of Cindy Lang—a beautiful fashion model, of course she would be the type of woman to be

Alice's girlfriend—and then I looked back at this girl in Utica, yearning for Alice to notice her. Her face haunted me. It was not the last time I would see it this night.

I found Artie King, and we headed back for the motel in a rented station wagon. Artie was twenty-nine years old, and as the engineer on the sound board, he rightfully considered himself to be just as important to the music as any of the performers on stage. He was not taken aback by the degree of on-the-road adulation for Alice Cooper, for he was not new to this; he had worked sound boards for a number of different groups, including the Monkees in their brief period of hysterical popularity, and he understood the nature of rock and roll fame.

"Hell, this is crazy, but the Monkees' tours were sixty times this," he said as he drove. "Each of those guys demanded to have his *own* limo. If you wanted to make it with a thirteen-year-old girl in your room, then a security guard would stand outside your door so no one could bother you. There were six hundred-dollar-a-night call girls waiting in every city. We had a regular airlines charter, with a regular airline stewardess, and by the third week of the tour, she was fucking in the aisle, putting on a show for everybody. That was one crazy time. Those guys couldn't walk outside their hotel without getting mobbed. And now look at them. Where are they? When's the last time you heard anyone talk about them?"

We drove through the winter dusk, three hours away from an arena full of screaming idolaters who, at least for this one night, would trade their souls for the chance to live like Alice Cooper. "I've seen it happen before," Artie said. "And you know it's going to happen forever. No matter how smart and hip any rock and roll star seems, he'd better keep his head on straight. I love Alice and these guys. But they'd better

understand how it works. Because any one of them could lose everything in one week.”

There was unpleasantness after the show, and it started right away. Dick Klotzman, the promoter, had arranged to have a buffet for us as soon as we came off stage, so after we toweled off we all climbed a flight of metal stairs, and arrived in a narrow room. A long table ran down one side of the room, and it was completely covered with a lavish and diverse arrangement of delicatessen-style food. Klotzman had also purchased presents for each of us, and they were individually wrapped and tagged—rings and key chains and pins, belated Christmas gifts from the promoter. It was a typically garish and friendly Klotzman effort, and all of the Cooper people, plus whatever locals were able to talk their way past the security guards, attacked the food hungrily.

But as the party wore on, and the tour people consumed more and more of the liquor that was provided in seemingly endless quart bottles, the mood turned a little rambunctious. Two of our roadies, Ronnie Volz and Goose Graham, engaged each other in an impromptu wrestling match. They tumbled about the room, and when Graham tried to tackle Volz, Volz grabbed one of the sections of the food-laden table, and upended it. The cold cuts and cheese and coleslaw and potato salad crashed to the floor, and within seconds the room was a trash pit. Volz then picked up a case of beer, and walked out with it. Klotzman’s assistants became angry, accused our crew of being “Grand Funk roadies”—apparently the supreme insult to traveling rock and roll equipment men—and by the time the post-show party was over, nerves were raw.

Alice and Norm and Neal and I rode out of the arena parking lot in one of the limousines, and as soon as we pulled into traffic, I noticed that a car occupied by two girls was

following us. Our driver tried to lose them, but they stayed on our tail.

“I’m starved,” Alice said. “Is there a McDonald’s around here?”

“I can find one,” said the driver, who was Kenny Kunkel’s young son, spelling his father for the night.

“All right,” Alice said. “Let’s go there.”

“Jesus, Alice,” Neal said. “I want to go back to the hotel. We just had all that food at the party. How can you be hungry?”

“I didn’t eat any of it,” Alice said.

“Well, why not?” Neal said.

“Ah, you know,” Alice said. “It was just sitting out there open…”

“And someone’s going to poison you, right?” Neal said.

“I know, I know,” Alice said. “It’s just an idiosyncrasy I have, okay? Give me a break.”

We drove through Utica, and pulled into a McDonald’s lot. Norm took orders from all of us, and went in to get the food. As soon as he had left the car, the two girls who had been following us drove into the parking lot, and took the space right next to us. The girl driving was pretty enough, but the one in the passenger seat was a shockingly gorgeous blonde who looked to be all of fourteen years old.

“Don’t even turn your head,” Alice said. “That’s fifteen to twenty years in the pen right over there.”

Neal pushed his window button, and when it had whirred open, he called to the blonde: “Uh, just out of curiosity, how

old are you?”

“Eighteen,” the girl said, and smiled demurely.

“Eighteen,” Neal said. “Uh, where are you going?”

“Wherever you’re going,” the girl said, still smiling. “Are we bothering you?”

Alice pulled the collar of his leather coat up over his face.

“Why don’t you come over here and really bother me?” Neal said.

“*Neal!*” Alice whispered urgently. “Put that window up! I don’t do this anymore! I mean it! Put it up!”

Just then Norm returned with the burgers, and we resumed on our way to the hotel. The girls were really on us now, staying within half a car length of our rear bumper all the way into the lot of the Ramada Inn. But when our limousine driver let us out by the front door, the girl behind the wheel of their car got so excited about trying to find a parking space that she slammed her foot onto the accelerator when she was trying to use the brake—and her car smashed into the side of a parked Chevrolet, putting a massive dent in both a front and a back door of the other car. She threw her car into reverse, lurched backward, and was out onto the highway and gone.

Alice and Norm went to their suite, but most of the rest of us went to the hotel bar. It was crowded with local people, mostly college students and young married couples out on a Saturday night. We pulled four tables together over in a corner, and started our own party. The next day was open, except for a midafternoon flight to Buffalo; the last show of the tour was two days away, so no one was concerned about waking up early.

The drunkenness that had started at the arena now was getting out of hand. The Utica people were looking at us as if we were a strange anthropological exhibit, and some of the roadies were responding by becoming boisterous, screaming for more drinks, laughingly berating the waitresses. It was the opposite of what the scene had been at La Sexe Machine in Montreal; this kind of public rowdiness and obnoxious takeover of the place was what bawdy rock and roll legends were made of, and our people were doing their best to make Utica remember us.

And in the middle of the carousing, the pock-marked, glitter-covered girl with the “Billion Dollar Babies” shirt arrived in the bar. I had seen her at the show, from the stage; she had managed to get to the front row, and had tried unsuccessfully to make Alice look at her throughout the performance. Now she was here, and she had found the tour party. And she was making the mistake of trying to become a part of it by being just as shrill and as exuberant as the rest of us, as if her costume would guarantee her admittance to the inner circle. But no one knew her, and as soon as she started to talk, the other conversation at the table stopped.

“I was just upstairs looking for Alice’s room,” she said loudly.

No one spoke. Finally Andy Mills said to her, “Oh, go home, you’re a fucking dog.”

Goose Graham half rose, and said to her, “Arf! Arf! Arf! Arf! Arf!”

The girl did not budge. She seemed confused. All those nights of listening to the records, all those days of telling herself that she was not ugly, she was just different, she was a freak like Alice Cooper, and now she had finally found the Cooper people, and this was happening.

“You’re a dog!” Andy Mills said.

The girl hesitated, as if to leave. But then she stood her ground, and she said, “You just think I have too much balls because I went upstairs looking for Alice.”

“I don’t think anything, you fucking dog,” Andy Mills said. “Just go home.”

“I’m the dog,” the girl said. “I’m the dog.”

David Libert, who was within forty-eight hours of being rid of his tour responsibilities, was drinking heavily for the first time of the trip. He picked up a glass pitcher of beer and shoved it in the direction of the girl. “Why don’t you put your tits in this beer?” he said.

“You show me yours,” the girl said.

Goose Graham pulled up his tee shirt to bare his chest.

A bartender yelled out, “Last call.”

“Ah, just bring us some more fucking *drinks*!” Andy Mills screamed.

Most of the local people were beginning to leave. It was nearly two a.m., closing time. But some of the married couples had been looking at us ever since we had come into the bar. I had overheard a few of the men calling us “queers” and “faggots”; but

I could see in the women’s eyes that they did not agree, that they were intrigued by this bunch of sloppy, carefree, self-confident young men in the corner. And sure enough, some of the young wives began to come over and quietly ask us our room numbers, and promise that they would be back

later on, after they had returned home and their husbands had fallen asleep.

One of the women hovered around us, making eye contact with anyone who would have her, and letting it be known that she was so happy that we were here to break the boredom. “Linda,” her husband called to her from two tables down, “We’re leaving now.”

“In a minute,” she called to him without looking, then turned to him, said, “Smile, honey,” and resumed her eye games at our table.

“That’s it,” the chief bartender announced, ostensibly to the whole room, but really for the benefit of the Cooper tables. “We’re closed. Clear it out.”

“MORE FUCKING DRINKS!” Andy Mills bellowed.

Ronnie Volz darted about the barroom, picking up half-empty bottles of wine from vacated tables and bringing them over to us. He accumulated enough alcoholic dregs to keep us going for another hour or so. But the bartenders, seeing that we were well stocked, came over and stood ominously by our tables, staring us down and preparing themselves to toss us out physically.

“Aw, come on,” Libert said to them. “Just bring us some beer and some wine. We won’t make any trouble.”

“We... are... closed,” the biggest of the bartenders said.

Ronnie Volz ran up with yet another used bottle of wine, and one of the bartenders wrenched it from his hand. We all looked at one another, and wordlessly decided that it was, indeed, time to leave the bar. We got up from the tables, and headed for the door.

The glitter girl was coming in just as we were going out. Somehow she had left and had managed to find us a full pitcher of beer, and she was carrying it, being careful not to spill any. “I got you some brew,” she said.

“FUCKING DOG!” Andy Mills screamed at her. “I TOLD YOU TO GO HOME!”

We went to the elevators, and the girl stood still with the pitcher. Some of the women from the bar followed us, including a few of the married ones, who simply abandoned their husbands for the night. But the girl in the “Billion Dollar Babies” shirt did not follow. The last I saw her, she was still holding her pitcher of beer in the doorway of the bar.

I went to my room and made some phone calls to friends in Chicago. I planned to talk to them for half an hour or so, and then get some sleep. But shortly after we went to the rooms, there was a furious banging on my door.

“Come on out!” a voice shouted. “We’re gonna kick some ass in this joint!”

It was Neal Smith. He was good and drunk. He had seemed on the verge of going out of control down in the bar, and by now he sounded crazy. His wife was not on the tour this night, and whenever Babette dropped off for a day or two, Neal seemed to react explosively. She had not been in Toronto on the night of his angry outburst in the limousine, and here in Utica, when we had been having some drinks before the show, Neal had said that he wished Babette was with him at every stop, because she calmed him down.

The banging did not let up, so I went to the door and opened it. Neal threw an arm around my shoulder. “You’re not going to bed yet!” he howled. “We’re gonna have some fun!”

Goose Graham was next to Neal. “Uterus New York!” Goose was hollering. “Fucking Uterus New York!” Goose was the roadie whose job it was to set up Neal’s drums on the stage every night. He was a strong, gangly young man of twenty, and he held Neal in awed veneration. “All right, boss!” Goose cried at Neal. “What we gonna do?”

Neal shook up a beer can, then popped the opener halfway. A thin, rapid stream of foam began to shoot out. Neal whirled around and started to coat the walls of the hallway with the foam. Goose followed suit. They had a a case of beer in the corridor, and they began opening two and three cans at a time, throwing the beer all over the hallway, knocking on doors and heaving the cans at the people when they responded.

Neal picked up four cans and hurled them down the hallway. where they scraped against the walls and smacked against the floor at the other end. There were room service trays outside almost every door, containing the remains of dinners and snacks; Neal kicked at them, scattering the garbage all up and down the corridor.

Some other roadies peeked out their doors, then rushed out to join in the destruction. Led by Neal, they charged into an elevator and within seconds covered the walls and ceding and floor with all the beer they could pour and throw. They ran into room 242, where two roadies were registered, and kicked a gaping hole in the wall, smashed two lamps, ripped a pillow open. They stomped holes in two of the room’s other walls. They threw two chairs into the wall, breaking off the arms and legs. Neal and Goose ripped and slashed at the drapes; they drenched the carpet with beer, and then pulled the beds away from the wall and tore at the mattresses.

“All right, boss!” Goose yelled. He was so happy to be a part of this; the roadies would have been too frightened of

reprisals from Shep ever to do anything like this on their own, but with Neal it was all right, it was sanctioned. Nobody could tell Neal what to do; this was his tour, after all, and if Neal wanted to use this night in Utica to let off some steam, then Goose was only too pleased to go along.

They ran out into the hallway. Neal slipped on a puddle of beer, crashed to the floor, laughed wildly, and then pulled himself up. Goose knocked loudly on doors, and shouted, “Got any dope? Got any beer? Got any coke? Got any hash?”

There were feathers and broken dishes and sticky beer and bits of meat and bread and vegetables and pastry everywhere. Mike Bruce, in his underwear, stuck his head out his door, and saw that Neal was involved. The unwritten rule still stood: anyone can do anything he wants to. So Mike stopped short of asking Neal to cut it out. The closest he came was to say, “Hey, man, you’ve *done* this hall. Do another hall and let me get some sleep, okay? What would Rod Stewart say?”

But Neal was just getting into his rampage. Exit signs were ripped from the wall; fire extinguishers were grabbed from their glass cases and squirted at doorways. Neal was a huge, howling figure as he charged up and down the hallway. “I’ll pay for it all!” he screamed. “Fuck it! I feel like tearing this place apart!”

Me? I just followed and watched in wonder. To ask him to stop would have been futile, and once he had gone this far, I figured that the best thing for me to do would be to just stick it out and see what happened. It was so odd to watch Neal perform his demolition. There was no sense of danger or anger; Neal was almost whimsical as he destroyed the hotel. In the morning it would look like the work of a madman, but as he did it, he was almost good-natured. In principle, I knew that I should be appalled by this wanton

destruction of other people’s property. But I was taking it in like a movie, and making no effort to let Neal know that he probably shouldn’t be doing this. I was playing by the tour rules too; although I didn’t join in the tearing up myself, neither did I do anything to end it. This was Neal’s bewildering way of livening up a dull evening, and I was merely along for the ride.

He kept calling for me to come with him. He left the band’s hallway, and proceeded to run up and down the other corridors in the hotel and wake up the regular guests. He and Goose stormed into the lobby. A young man of eighteen or so had drawn the all-night shift behind the front desk, and as soon as he saw Neal, he recoiled. Goose ran up to the desk, grabbed the young man by the front of his shirt, and demanded, “Where’s the pretty girls?”

“It’s three o’clock in the morning,” the clerk whimpered. “This is Utica, New York.”

“Uterus New York!” Goose shouted. “Uterus New York!”

Neal was falling all over himself. Alice and Norm’s suite was on the second floor, at the top of a semicircular staircase. Neal bounded up the stairs, and kicked at the door with his boots.

Norm came to the doorway, groggy and naked.

“Where’s the party?” Neal yelled.

“I’m sleeping,” Norm said, and closed the door.

Libert’s room was on this same corridor, and Neal sprinted over to it. There was a “Do Not Disturb” sign on the door knob. Neal banged and banged on the door. Libert would not answer.

“All right, then,” Neal called. “Fuck you, Libert!” He jumped up and down on a cluttered, overflowing room service tray outside the room, breaking every dish on it, and then kicked the pieces around the hallway.

For the next hour, Neal roamed the hotel, ripping ash trays off hallway walls, crushing any room service dishes that got in his way, smashing his boot heels into doorways. He was accompanied by Goose and an ever-shifting group of additional roadies. At four a.m., as he was taking a breather in what had used to be room 242, the telephone rang. It was Libert, asking him to stop.

“Fuck it, Libert, I’m having fun!” Neal screamed into the receiver. “You just figure out how much it costs, and I’ll pay for everything!”

I went back to my room, to get some sleep. The hallway was still filled with the sounds of breaking and crashing as I drifted off.

Shep Gordon was knocking on my door at nine a.m. “It’s me, Bob,” he said. “We have to check your room.”

I got out of bed and opened the door. Shep was standing with the motel’s manager. The manager, a dark-haired man of around thirty-five, was carrying a clipboard. “We’re adding up all the damages,” Shep said. The motel manager looked around, said, “This one’s okay,” and made a mark on his checklist of rooms.

I put some clothes on and went out into the hallway. It looked like Belfast on a nasty morning. All the debris from the night before was still there, plus more. Down at the end of the hall, an ice machine had been ripped from its mooring on the wall. And, incredibly, a heavy, seven-foot-high soft drink vending machine had been picked up and thrown

down a flight of cement stairs, where it now rested on its side. The corridor was filled with the stench of stale beer.

I followed Shep and the motel manager as they went from room to room. Both men were shaking their heads. Shep appeared to be genuinely unhappy. It was hard enough booking rooms for the Alice Cooper band without this happening to a member of the Ramada chain.

When we got to Neal's room, his door was open. He had returned to the room only an hour or so before; neither of his beds was even rumpled. The room looked as if no one had ever used it.

Neal, thoroughly hung over, was draped across one of the beds. He was wearing a red-white-black-and-yellow plaid suit, a blue beret, a single animal's tooth earring, silver sunglasses, a turquoise bracelet, and black-and-orange leather driving gloves. He was watching a Sunday morning religious television show.

The motel manager glanced quickly around the immaculate room.

"Now, if everyone in your group could follow this young man's example, there would be no problem," the motel manager said.

"Thank you," Neal said.

The motel manager and Shep left the room. I stayed. Neal waited until they had been gone for about thirty seconds. Then he pressed his hands against the back of his head. "Oh, God!" he said. "I don't know how I'm even alive this morning. Oh, well. It's the first time I ever had a four thousand-dollar room-service bill."

In an hour, we were checking out. Shep and Libert met with the motel manager, in his office. They were at their most polite and charming, and they managed to get the damage bill down from four thousand dollars to three, and then, finally, to thirteen hundred. Libert came into the main lobby to tell Neal how much he would be billed for.

“Hey, that’s not fair,” Neal said. “I didn’t do the Coke machine. I know I didn’t do that. I shouldn’t be charged for that one.”

“I don’t want to talk about it, Neal,” Libert said. “I tried to discuss it with you at four o’clock in the morning, and you said, I want to wreck the fucking hotel, Libert, I’ll pay for it.’ So you’re paying.”

Our corridor was already becoming a Utica tourist attraction. The word had spread, and people were arriving from all over town to ride the beer-drenched elevator upstairs, and see the new rock and roll museum. As the townspeople trooped through the lobby, Larry Hitchcock, ever the tour philosopher, watched the parade, and said, “Ah, the great pressures of superstardom. It all comes down to the motel wallboard, and the ball-bearing stacked heel of Neal Smith’s snakeskin boot.”

Libert paid our bill, including the damages, with his American Express card, and we got into the waiting limousines. Kenny Kunkel, now in the last leg of his civic duty as a Cooper driver, turned around, chuckling, and said to Neal, “Wrecked the walls, did you? Yeah, those kids at the show hurt one of my cars last night, too, they busted the radio and the trunk, they jumped on the hood, and they wrote ‘Alice and gang’ all over it.” For some reason, Mr. Kunkel seemed to want to establish a bond of camaraderie between himself and Neal, as if the fact that they had both

been involved in property damage was a way to link them, regardless of their respective roles in the night's destruction.

"I didn't have anything to do with it," Alice said. "I just don't want any of this to get in the press. Are you really paying for all of it, Neal?"

"Yeah, I guess so," Neal said. "If Goose had to pay, he couldn't afford to wear any clothes for the next year."

"I'll tell you," Kenny Kunkel said, "you boys will be the talk of this town for a while. People will be coming to see what you did to that motel right up until they get it fixed again."

But if we were to remain notorious in Utica, Utica was a forgotten part of our tour by the time we reached Buffalo. Just another weird moment along the way. It was good for a few jokes on the flight over; Libert said to Neal, "At the next stop I have two limos, two station wagons, a truck, a van, and a sledge hammer in case you want to wreck anything." And when Neal asked how long it would be before we would land in Buffalo, Libert said, "Five minutes, but if you're bored, here." He handed Neal one of the airplane's oxygen tanks, and said, "You can smash a window with this."

Within an hour, we were at the Sheraton Inn in Buffalo. Neal was reunited with Babette. Shep was making phone calls in the Rockefeller Suite. Alice was hitting golf balls in the Caruso Suite, and laughing at Anita Bryant as she sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" before the televised Miami-Oakland football game. Mike Bruce was swimming in the hotel's heated indoor pool. Utica was yesterday. Now there was just one more show, and the tour would be over.

TWENTY-TWO

There was one thing I had not done on the tour, and that was to spend any significant amount of time with Glen Buxton. He was such a solitary figure, and the other performers tended to stay away from him so much, that I never found myself having dinner or sharing a drink with him. He did not hang out with anyone else, and as we arrived at the last stop of the tour, I realized that I did not really know him.

On the few occasions when I had talked to Glen—on stage, in the dressing rooms, on the planes—he was always pleasant and friendly enough to me. But the mood of the rest of the band was such that I had become conditioned to thinking of him almost as a non-person. The others were sick of his lack of discipline, his musical sloppiness on stage. All of them looked at Glen mostly with sadness; he had been one of them, but he had deteriorated socially to such an extent that they now were uncomfortable whenever they had to deal with him. For all the pampering that was done for the band, they considered their on-stage selves to be cold, steady professionals. And they saw Glen as a self-indulgent infant who was so hard to work with on a business level any more that there was a question of whether it was worth it to have him around. Something like Neal's rampage in Utica could be excused as rock and roll decadence; but Glen's perpetual tardiness, his stoned-out, messy, ragged performances on stage, and his lifestyle of spending hours upon hours getting high behind his locked door struck the others as inexcusable amateurism, and they were becoming increasingly disgusted with it.

The fans were unaware of this. Although Glen's amplifiers were turned drastically down, he still stood in a well-lit, conspicuous place on the stage, and to anyone in the

audience, he seemed to be one of the five main members of the Cooper band. That was the image that Shep and Alice wanted to keep. There were no odds in letting the public know about trouble within a major band, so Glen was kept on, and the other guitarists, including hired hand Mick Mashbir, carried the brunt of the musical load.

I felt bad for Glen, because he seemed to be a nice enough fellow, almost timid at times, and I didn't relish hearing the others express their disdain for him. But I knew that they were in a different position than I was—they had to work with him and depend on him twelve months a year—and I could understand how their nerves were becoming frayed by his attitude of being laid back to the point of somnambulism. Most of the talking was done behind Glen's back, and he did not realize the depth of the dissatisfaction with him. The more I heard the others complain, the more curious I was to talk at length with him by myself.

When we got to Buffalo, I asked Glen if I could come down to his room during the afternoon. He said yes, and around four o'clock on the day we arrived, I knocked on his door.

As soon as he let me in, he began to pace rapidly around the room. "Am I making you nervous?" he said. "I just have to be up walking around all the time. It's just the way I am." As usual, the first thing I noticed about Glen was his face—it was so much more weathered and lined than his twenty-six years would indicate, it was not a rock and roller's face, but the face of a worried, aging businessman with trouble both at home and at the office. I would often think about that when I saw him tuning up at the arenas; he would wear black knee-length socks and white loafers underneath his satin on-stage sailor costume, and he would look so wasted that I wondered what his teenage fans would think if they could see him at close range.

I did not want to grill him on his relationships with the other members of the group; I knew that the problem was there, and rather than antagonize him, I preferred to try to find out something of what he was like, what he thought about. But I did want to know about the drinking problem that had almost ended his rock and roll career.

“That was as close as I ever want to come to croaking,” he said. “I just showed up in an emergency room one day and said, ‘I need an operation.’ I knew I was really in bad shape. My stomach had hurt for a while, but I had never had it treated. What it was, was that I had been drinking steadily since I was fifteen years old, and drinking heavily every day since the time I was twenty-one. Hey, I’m talking about two quarts of vodka and a case of beer a day. I never met anyone who could outdrink me. The doctors looked at me, and they said that my pancreas was swelled to five times its normal size. When I was in the hospital, they took about five gallons of poison out of me every day. I almost died in there. The doctor said that if I ever drank again, then that was it, it was all over for me.”

I asked him why he thought he had become an alcoholic in the first place.

“But I wasn’t an alcoholic,” Glen said. “See, I didn’t need it. I was just powered by it, because I liked it. It was just a habit. But when they told me that I couldn’t drink any more... well, I haven’t had a drink since, so I must not have been an alcoholic.”

I asked if he, too, was concerned about all of Alice’s personal fame.

“Hey, that’s Alice’s job,” Glen said. “He digs people. Me, I’d just as soon sit in my hotel room and practice. I don’t have to have a newspaper say I’m a star to know I’m a star. I *am* a

star. Goose and Andy put my amps on the stage, and they know I’m a star. But if they didn’t put the amps there, I’d put them there myself. Am I talking too much?”

I asked him what it meant to him to be a star.

He kept walking around the room. “It gives me... a license,” he said. “So I can have my own style. You know what it means? It means that if someone says it’s not ‘in’ to wear that pair of shoes, they can look at me and see that I’m wearing the pair of shoes, and then they change their mind and say that it’s ‘in’ to wear them, because I’m wearing them. Seeing my name in headlines wouldn’t do as much as that.”

I said that I knew the material success he was enjoying now was far removed from the unpretentious way he had lived as a child growing up. I asked him if it had been hard for him to get used to the fancy living.

“Hey, I’ll tell you about that,” he said. “I want to say that I hate the limousine drivers. The limo drivers have an IQ of about four. They’re so fucking dumb. They’re dumber than any robot could be. They’ll stand there, and it’ll be raining or snowing, and I only remember once on this tour when the limousine driver was smart enough to open the trunk for us to get our guitars. They’ll just be standing there, and we’ll be going ‘trunk, trunk,’ and they won’t know what we’re talking about. I hate that, you know?

“I have a theory. Let’s see. It’s this. ‘The only thing that’s stopping musicians from making their own music is themselves.’ I really believe that. How did I say that?”

“You said, ‘The only thing that’s stopping musicians from making their own music is themselves,’” I said.

“That’s right,” Glen said. “That’s what I believe. And you can print that. I mean it, you can quote me.”

I asked him why teenagers trusted rock and roll music and the men who made it, when they respected and trusted almost nothing else.

“You know why?” he said. “Because it scares the businessman to see someone like me with money. Because money is power. And the kids see that the businessmen are scared of a guy like me, and that’s why they trust rock musicians.”

He still had not sat down since I had come into the room. “Can I ask you something?” he said.

“Sure,” I said.

“Who are you writing this interview for?” he said. “A rock magazine or something?”

I had suspected as much. Glen had no idea why I was on the tour, why I was on his stage every night, why I was always on the airplanes and in the limousines. Everyone else on the trip—musicians, roadies, managers, even local promoters and drivers—had begun to ask me almost daily about the progress of my book. Sometimes, when I was on the stage, Neal or Mike would point out to an especially bizarre-looking fan in the audience and say, “There’s one to put in your book.” But Glen was so removed from the rest of the tour party, I had guessed that he perhaps did not know why I was along. So I explained to him about why Shep had let me be a part of the show, and about the book I was working on.

Glen looked somewhat embarrassed. “Oh,” he said. “No one told me.”

I asked him if he thought he was as good a musician as he ever was. It was the closest I had come to getting into the personal differences he had with the rest of the group, and he peered at me defensively and waited a moment before answering.

“Of course,” he said. “Definitely. I’m a *better* musician.”

He paused again. “Who do you think it was who taught Dennis Dunaway to play?” he said. “We were freshmen in high school, and I went down to a pawn shop with him one day and helped him buy his first bass. I showed him what each string was.”

He handed me a small loose-leaf notebook. “I do some writing and stuff myself,” he said. “I write stuff down in here.”

His scrawl was like a child’s. Mostly the book was filled with short poems on cosmic, discursive subjects. Many of them rambled with the same kind of nonsensical, ethereal, alleged insights that a high school freshman commits to paper after he has tried marijuana for the first time, and notices that he can see colors and hear his watch ticking from the nightstand all the way across the room. There was also a comic strip Glen had drawn. It appeared to be the work of a kindergartener, and was composed of crudely drawn stick figures. He had titled it “Dennis the Fuckin’ Pest.” He told me that he was interested in the idea of starting a comic strip, and that he also wanted to found a “video production company.”

I flipped through the book. “Oh, listen,” he said suddenly. “Sometimes I write messages to myself in there, and I use a kind of personal code. Like, if it says, ‘Buy cocaine on Wednesday,’ that means something else, like I’m supposed to pick up the groceries.”

I tossed his notebook back to him. “Glen,” I said, “just as a hypothetical question, what would you do if the opportunity to play with this band were to be taken away from you? Like if your health got bad again, or something like that. If you woke up tomorrow morning, and found out that you no longer had Alice Cooper, what would that mean to you?”

“But that would never happen,” he said. “This is the work that I’m supposed to be doing. It’s the purpose of my life. When you’re doing the work that’s right for you, that’s a good thing. It’s a nice thing. When I came out of the hospital after my pancreas, my mom asked me why I was going to go back on the road right away, and my dad said, ‘Because it’s his job.’ I could never give this up. But you’re just talking in theory, right? Well, I guess I would just have to find another outlet for myself. It definitely would be a heartbreaking thing. I can’t even tell you what it means to me. When I go to shave, and I look in the mirror, I can look myself right in the eye, and say, ‘Yeah, you’re cool.’ I wouldn’t even want to think about losing that.”

Glen was pacing even faster now, fooling with the thermostat and the television channel selector and the curtains. I got up to leave, but before I went I asked him one more question.

“What’s the one thing you’ve done in your life that you’re the proudest of?” I said.

Glen didn’t even hesitate. “That’s easy,” he said. “I’ve thought about that one. I’m proudest of living past twenty-five. I made it past my twenty-fifth birthday. Now I know I can make it. Now I can live as long as I want.”

The final show was on New Year’s Eve. Libert made his last phone calls to our rooms, and we gathered in the lobby of

the Sheraton Inn. The hotel was booked solid for the night. Throngs of Buffalo party-goers were arriving through the front doors as we waited to get into the limousines. The party people were full of laughter and holiday good cheer. We didn't fit in. Perhaps it was the idea of being away from home on New Year's Eve, or perhaps just the thought of the last performance of the tour, but whatever the reason, we sat glumly on the couches and chairs, and did not engage even in the minimal small talk that usually filled these moments.

We arrived at the War Memorial Auditorium just before ZZ Top finished their encore, as usual. This time, though, when they had finished "Jailhouse Rock," instead of going to their own dressing room, changing their clothes and riding back to their own motel, they came into our locker room. We had mixed with them hardly at all during the trip, but tonight was uncommon, being the final night and New Year's, and so we sat around with them and their roadies, and drank beer and talked about the tour. They were quiet young Texans who had been fighting a hard battle the whole time on the road—it was not easy to be the opening act for Alice Cooper, when the people in the audience were all going out of their minds in anticipation of seeing the main madness begin. But ZZ Top had been good, and the reception for them in every city had been enthusiastic. Still, for all the effort by both bands on this night to act like old comrades, the fact remained that no one in our group really knew anyone in their group, and the feeling in the dressing room was like that at a cocktail party where everyone is aware of everyone else's identities, but the formal introductions have yet to be made.

Norm Klein seemed distracted as he sat with Alice and played a hand of cards. After a few minutes, Alice got up and

went to talk to the ZZ Top musicians, and I asked Norm if something was wrong.

“Oh, I don’t know,” he said. “I’m just kind of depressed, that’s all. I’ve tried to look at this as just a job, and I think I did do a pretty good job. Like, if you ever noticed, when I was working on the stage, I always worked either standing or in a crouch, instead of kneeling, because that gave me an extra half a step if anything ever happened and I had to run out and protect Alice.

“But it’s been more than just a job to me. I’ve really had the time of my life, and I have to say that I’m awfully sorry to see it end. I don’t look forward to going back to California tomorrow morning. After the show in Utica, when Alice and I went back to the suite, I poured him a drink, and then I asked him if he minded if I took one, also. Alice couldn’t believe it. I never drink. But that’s when I started feeling down, when I realized that after one more show, it was going to be over. So Alice and I just sat in the room and drank together.”

I knew how Norm was feeling. I was already fighting twinges of melancholy myself at the prospect of going home the next day. Yes, the tour had its pettiness and backbiting and superficiality and callousness. But if there was any place in life where you could avoid those things, I didn’t know about it. Every time I noticed one of those imperfections, I knew that it was the newspaperman in me coming out again, being drawn to the conflict and the chaos. And I also knew that when I would think about the tour after it was over, the thoughts would be good ones, because if Norm was having the time of his life, well, so was I, and I wouldn’t have given it up for anything. In the end, the fantasy held.

Alice was looking unhappy. I knew that he was upset because Cindy Lang had not come up to Buffalo for New

Year’s Eve. He said that she was staying in New York because she was not feeling well, but I could tell that no matter what the reason for her absence, he was lonely on New Year’s Eve, and he was feeling sorry for himself. He came up and sat next to me, and said, “Well, one more time and your rock and roll career is over.”

“I know,” I said. “I think I’m going to miss it.”

“Oh, you may be surprised,” he said. He stood in front of a mirror, and adjusted his satin sailor suit, made sure that his makeup was not smearing under his eyes.

“Do you ever find yourself out there on stage, and think how silly you must look in all your costumes and mascara?” I asked him.

“Don’t you, when you’re wearing that Santa Claus suit?” Alice said.

“Sure I do,” I said. “But for me, it’s just a ridiculous role I’m playing.”

“Well, what do you think it is for me?” Alice said.

He had achieved his goal, and more; he was one of the very biggest stars of popular culture in all the world. But that wasn’t enough anymore. The savage, insane singer the teenagers idolized was not him; in a sense, he became just as much a part of the audience as they when the Alice Cooper creature took the stage. Now his name appeared with regularity in virtually every one of the world’s most prominent periodicals, but he was just beginning to realize that, to maintain his fame, he would be expected to jack the demented image up one more notch every time the old act palled. He was living the good life, he was wealthy and sought after. But the thought of what he might have to do to

keep his status—the thought that he might have to go out on stage every working night for the rest of his life, and pretend to be a sadistic, mindless degenerate for the benefit of an audience that remained young while he grew older, a pubescent audience without his own saving sense of irony—that thought frightened him, made him sorrowful. It was a trap that could, finally, drive him crazy, and he knew it.

He was already looking for an escape, a way to maintain his money and his fame without spending the rest of his days listening to fourteen-year-olds screaming for him to put a hatchet to a baby doll's throat. Even now, before the tour was over, Shep was working on devices to move Alice out of this world. There was a movie in the works—it would deal with a rock and roll tour, but its real purpose was to give Alice a chance to perform before the cameras, and to get a feel for legitimate acting. Toward that end, a bit role for him opposite Helen Hayes in "The Snoop Sisters" television show had been arranged. He would soon be appearing as a panelist on the "Hollywood Squares" game show, and as a presenter at the Grammy Awards program. He would turn up in publicity photographs posing with established movie stars, with society figures, with business leaders. It would not be easy, but he was going to try to change what he stood for, to move on, to free himself from the captivity of the gore-loving teenagers who had raised him from obscurity and delivered him to prominence. "He thinks he's going to make his image more positive," Mike Bruce had told me one night. "Well, maybe he should have thought of that before he started murdering babies and filling the stage floor with blood."

All that would come later, however, and even if it failed, perhaps he could always turn back to the guillotines and the mannequin parts and the snake, and see if they would still

work for him. Tonight, though, was really no time to be pondering all of that. Tonight we still had a show to put on.

It was a wild, charging crowd, out for a turbulent night on New Year's Eve. The young, tee-shirted security guards inside the barricade were drinking whisky from the bottle and smoking dope that was handed to them from the audience. Several times during the first few songs, Norm leaped into the space between the barricade wall and the stage, and tried to make the guards stop. But they ignored him, and finally he gave up. Several young boys attempted to jump the wall and get to the stage; the guards dragged them to the floor, beat on them, and then tossed them back into the crowd. For the front row girls, it was easier; some of them eased themselves onto the barricade wall, and leaned over sideways until they were resting on the front of the stage. When one of the security guards playfully began to feel one of the girls up, she offered no objection. Within minutes, it had become a minor fad, with the girls fighting to make contact with the stage, and the young guards laughing out loud and grabbing whatever looked good to them.

The show was loud, tough, tight. Near the end, I saw Rebecca Segal and Ronnie Volz close to the back of the stage, their arms draped over each others' shoulders, singing along and doing a rock and roll cancan as Alice and the band played "My Stars." Tonight, the roadies were not bothering to keep out of sight, but were watching the show from the sides of the stage near the front, so they could see it all. Normally Shep would not have allowed this, on the theory that it made the stage look too cluttered. But this night was special, and he saw what was happening and didn't say anything. We had started the show late so that we would still be on stage at midnight, and just before Alice came back out after the guillotine scene to sing "School's

Out," Mike Bruce stepped to a microphone, shouted, "Ten... nine... eight... seven... six... five... four... three... two... ONE!" and Alice came lunging into the spotlights, and the audience exploded, and we were into the new year.

There was scheduled to be an extra twist to my part tonight: Mike Roswell had dressed as the New Year's Baby, complete with a diaper and rattle, and I was supposed to dress up as Santa Claus, wheel him onto the stage in a wheelbarrow, dump him in front of the band, and then we were all to engage in the usual free-for-all to end the show. But the roadies had a plan of their own; they had prepared tin pie plates filled with shaving cream, and as soon as all of the performers came on stage for the last time, they were going to attack us with the plates.

The roadies' prank was an open secret, and because all of us were glancing at them out of the sides of our eyes in order to keep from getting hit from behind, the timing of the encore was immediately thrown off. I wheeled Roswell out, deposited him on the stage floor—and saw that the others were still in back of the stage setting, avoiding the roadies and the shaving cream.

So here we were, me looking like Santa Claus and Roswell looking like a six-foot baby, out in the middle of the stage all by ourselves. There were twelve thousand people in the audience, and they were all on their feet and screaming, charged with alcohol and dope and excitement, waiting for something to happen. Roswell and I looked at each other. We couldn't simply stand there. So we began to spit at each other, throw parts of the stage around, kick and slug and stomp, as if it were a part of the show. I must have finally become accustomed to the Cooper way of doing things, because the ad-libbing worked perfectly; the sight of Santa Claus and a baby in diapers trying to kill each other fit

exactly into the context of the show, and the audience loved it. Finally, Alice and the others joined us in the middle of the stage, and as soon as they appeared, the roadies charged on with their shaving cream.

It was supposed to be a joyous, unbridled, happy bit of slapstick, a final public blast of communal energy for everyone in the tour party. The pie plates and the shaving cream flew, and we all tumbled over one another and slid across the slick stage floor, and it seemed to go on and on. But then, at one point, I stood up and looked out at the audience. They were out of their minds with frenzy from the show, and from the liquor they had sneaked into the arena for their New Year's party, and from the confused, mad, harried gang fight that was taking place on the stage. Hundreds of them were trying to climb the barricade and join the melee.

And then I looked back, and I saw Alice. He was standing near the rear of the stage, detached from the lunacy. His arms were hanging limply by his sides. He was not moving. He was just staring out into the shrieking, churning audience, as if hypnotized by what he was seeing. I looked at him for perhaps fifteen seconds, with the craziness going on all around. He had been hit by some of the shaving cream, and it was hanging from his hair and his forehead. But he made no effort to wipe it away. He glanced over at me, and when our eyes met I saw as dejected and empty a look in his face as I ever hope to witness. He shook his head from side to side, once. Then, without waiting for the others, he turned and walked off the stage.

I followed, and when I arrived in the dressing room, Alice was saying to Norm Klein, "Please, get me *out* of here."

The rest of the band started to come into the locker room, covered with the sticky foam. They were slow in washing it

off and removing their costumes. The tour was over, and they seemed happy to sit around and have a post-show drink and take it easy. Neal brought me a paper cup of vodka, and asked me to come over to a corner of the room where he and Babette were sitting, to toast the new year with them.

Alice stayed off by himself. Usually, he was content to hang around the arenas as long as anyone felt like staying. On most nights he would sit and dawdle and not say a thing about going back to the motel until Libert announced that the cars were ready to leave. But tonight he talked animatedly to Norm and to Libert, and at last I heard him say, in a rising voice, “Please, I want to *go now*.” And so we did.

There was a party for us at the hotel when we returned. Our hallway was blocked off from the rest of the place, and two rooms had been filled with balloons and party hats and food and drink. Every would-be freak in the Buffalo area had heard about it, and had showed up. The Allman Brothers in concert were coming out of a radio, and an old Paul Revere and the Raiders videotape was appearing silently on a color television. The party spilled out into the hallway, and packed it full. It was hard to imagine that there were so many people in this town who owned outrageous see-through costumes, and gigantic stacked heels, and shimmering, glittery stage clothing. It was the kind of scene that used to appear in wire photos from the most consciously decadent San Francisco drag clubs; but Alice Cooper had made it acceptable for the children of heartland America, and here they were, at his New Year’s Eve party. The parents of Buffalo were here, too, wandering out of their own parties in the hotel and into our corridor, and drunkenly demanding to “talk to *Alice*.”

I walked out of my room, and had to step over three girls who were lounging in the hallway in front of my door. Mike Bruce and Neal Smith and Dennis Dunaway were caught in the mob, but they didn’t stay long. On this night, the best bet seemed to be to go to your room, double-lock the door, and wait until morning for the sparkly throng of Buffalo, New York, to go home again. Everywhere in the claustrophobic hallway and party rooms, the question was: When will Alice show up?

But Alice would not be showing up. Alice, as a matter of fact, was in his suite, inside one of the doors that the party people in the corridor were leaning against. He had come back from the arena and tried to call Cindy Lang in Manhattan, to wish her a happy new year. She had not been home to answer the phone. So Alice, on New Year’s Eve, sat in an armchair and watched an old movie called *Evil Roy Slade* on television. When it ended, he went to the bedroom, and dozed off. Cindy Lang called at four thirty. She said she had been at Times Square to watch the new year come in. She and Alice offered each other the best wishes of the season, and then he went back to sleep. The party continued until dawn.

TWENTY-THREE

Early the next afternoon, I packed my bag for the last time and went down to meet the others by the limousines. They would be flying commercial to New York; I would be going directly from Buffalo to Chicago. There was very little activity in the hallway. The local people had all been gone for hours, and the hotel maids had cleaned the place up so that it looked as though there had never been a party. Shep and Rebecca and David Libert were going over the ledgers, trying to balance the expenses for the end of the tour.

Alice and Neal were sitting in a limousine when I got there. Alice was saying, “I think I’m going out to Los Angeles next week on a kind of working vacation. The films of last Spring’s tour are ready, and I want to take a look at them and see what kind of a movie they’ll make.”

“What about that scene with the bulldozer wrecking the stage?” Neal asked. “Are we going to do that?”

“Yeah, I think so,” Alice said. “I’m going to write a lot of the scenes when I’m out there. I’m thinking about painting the set all white, and then having Burt Bacharach or some other big star playing the piano while the bulldozer’s knocking down the stage.”

“Listen, we wanted to talk to you about that,” Neal said. “We were doing some thinking. We don’t want too many extra guys in the movie. You know what I mean? Not all these guest stars. It should be the group’s movie. Just the five of us.”

Alice looked out the window and did not answer.

It was a quick ride to the airport. When we arrived, I went around and started saying my goodbyes to everyone. We

exchanged telephone numbers and said we'd be talking to one another soon, but it really didn't have the feel of something that was over. We were still in too much of a hurry. My flight and their flight were leaving within five minutes of each other, and we were running late. So we hustled down the concourse to the gates, and it seemed as though we were moving into one more arena locker room, or to one more limousine before the back-stage crowd could catch us. We still had the feel of the tour.

The security guards at the checkpoint tried to stop Andy Mills from taking the boa constrictor any farther along the corridor, but he had been through that before, and managed to keep talking and smiling and nodding as he moved past them and caught up with the rest of the group. "Sir, you have to come back here!" a woman guard called. "You can't take that on!"

Andy trotted along, carrying the snake in its case, and replied, "I just do what me boss says." By this time Libert was stalling the guard with slow, casual explanations, and Andy dashed on board the airplane, before the others.

The band's American Airlines flight to New York and my American flight to Chicago were departing from gates directly across a hallway from one another. So all of us stood around in the corridor until Libert and Rebecca arrived to give the go-ahead to get on board. As always, we were the object of whispers and attention from the other passengers at both gates.

"Okay," Libert said. "Let's get on."

The Cooper travelers moved toward their boarding area. I stood and watched them go, and then I turned around and walked toward the other gate.

“Hey!” I heard Neal Smith call. I looked back. He and Alice were standing together.

“Wrong one,” Alice said. “We’re over here.”

“I know,” I said. “I’m going straight to Chicago.”

“Let’s go,” Libert said to them. “We’re holding the flight up.”

Alice and Neal and Libert raised their hands and waved goodbye. I returned the wave. Then they boarded their plane, and I boarded mine.

I was airborne within five minutes. It was one of the few times that I had no one I knew to talk to since the tour had begun in Nashville. I tried reading a magazine, but I couldn’t concentrate. I kept getting a vague feeling that I was in the wrong place, that I shouldn’t be here by myself, I should be in the middle of all the others, on our way to the next city, thinking about the coming night’s performance.

I opened my briefcase, and pulled out my cassette recorder. My live concert tape was snapped into the machine, and I flipped the play mechanism into position. Instantly, I heard screaming and whistling, and the sounds of guitars and drums being tested out for the first time of the evening. I heard the voice of the Amazing Randi, close to the recorder, saying, “Did you see that food they have for us for after the show?” And then I heard a louder roar from the audience, and I knew that the arena lights had just been switched all the way off.

“And now,” came the voice of David Libert, “in the midst of their fantastic Holiday Tour... America’s own Billion Dollar Babies...”

I felt a hand on my shoulder. I looked up. It was the stewardess. “Sir,” she said, “I’m sorry to bother you. But I’m

afraid that all that noise is going to disturb the other passengers. Do you have an earplug or something that you can use?”

I said that I didn’t but that it was okay, I’d just put the recorder away. I placed it back in my briefcase, shoved the briefcase under the seat in front of me, and soon fell asleep. When I woke up, we were in our approach to O’Hare Airport in Chicago. It was snowing, and it took me twenty minutes to get a cab. The driver said that I was lucky I had made it in so early. The prediction was for eight inches by midnight.

About Bob Greene

Bob Greene is a columnist for the Chicago *Sun-Times*. His thrice-weekly reports and commentary are distributed to more than 100 other newspapers. He is the author of *Running: A Nixon-McGovern Campaign Journal*, and of *We Didn't Have None of Them Fat Funky Angels on the Wall of Heartbreak Hotel, and Other Reports from America*. His articles have appeared in *Newsweek*, *Harper's*, *Audience*, *Rolling Stone*, *New Times*, *Sport*, and *The New York Times*, and his commentary has been featured on the CBS radio and television networks.

New York Times
No Biz Like Show Biz
Nov. 14, 1974

BILLION DOLLAR BABY. By Bob Greene. 364 pages. Illustrated. Atheneum. $10.

At first it's intriguing. Here's the Alice Cooper rock ‘n’ roll group—proud to claim the title of “the sickest, most degenerate band in America—starring a young man from Arizona who turns his teen-age audiences on by chopping up blood-spilling dolls while singing a number called “Dead Babies,” fondling a boa constrictor to the tune of “Sick Things,” and literally spitting on the frenzied fans who crowd and crush each other at the footlights of his performances. And here's Bob Greene, a 27-year-old columnist for The Chicago Sun-Times, who's been given this chance to perform on a Christmas tour with the Alice Cooper troupe and indulge his fantasy of becoming a rock ‘n’ roll star. Some fun, huh? A slightly worm-eaten but otherwise fresh page from the notebooks of George Plimpton. An entertaining chance to see how the rock ‘n’ roll business really works.

Then it gets downright amusing Mr. Greene turns out to be a very good reporter, painting in simple primary colors one deceptively innocent scene after another. Alice Cooper—despite his carefully manufactured image as the monster the parents of teen-age America love to hate—is revealed as a witty but mild-mannered prototype of the successful kid next door. His real name is Vince Furnier, he's the son of an Arizona Fundamentalist, he was popular in high school, and he likes to play golf. He never touches drugs, he's loathe to kill so much as a cockroach, he likes gray-flannel suits, and he regards his success as a horror with wry amusement. So “Billion Dollar Baby” is a study of the put-on, right? An

anatomy of the principle that any publicity is good publicity, so long as the names are spelled correctly.

Strange Things Begin to Happen

Then it begins to get disturbing. Though business is business and there's no connection between the image and reality, strange things begin to happen. The members of the band grow bored with their dull routine and fall to bickering over Alice's growing superstar status. At the height of the 1973 energy crisis, while many Americans are waiting in line for a tankful of gas, the 30 members of the Alice Cooper troupe lounge around their chartered superjet, watching pornographic movies and complaining over the slightest delay. On a one-night stand in Toledo, Ohio, the audience, taking Alice's monstrous image seriously, drives the band off the stage with firecrackers and other dangerous projectiles, And when the manager, Shep Gordon, is asked if the band hasn't asked for this sort of incident, he blandly assures Mr. Greene, “If I had a child who was turned on by seeing actual, nonsimulated death, then I'd sit him down and talk to him … I would try to tell him what life means, what life is worth. I think that would do it.” So “Billion Dollar Baby” is a study in hypocrisy, hmmm?

Finally, the light dawns, and we see what Mr. Greene is really up to. Half of him may be this starry-eyed, good-natured fellow who befriends the members of the band, eats up the excitement of the rock ‘n’ roll scene, and suffers a genuine letdown when the tour is over and he has to give up his role with the group (he played a Santa Claus who walks on to the set at the end of the show and then gets knocked down and stomped by Alice and the rest of the troupe).